

THE
RIGHT TO LOVE

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DR. MAX NORDAU



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THE RIGHT TO LOVE



Dr. N. Nordan.

THE RIGHT TO LOVE

BY

DR. MAX NORDAU

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

BY

MARY J. SAFFORD

Authorized Edition

F. TENNYSON NEELY

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THE WORKS OF
Dr. MAX NORDAU,

Author of "Degeneration," Etc.

12mo. cloth. \$1.50 Per Volume.

The Comedy of Sentiment.

The Ailment of the Century.

The Right to Love.

For sale everywhere, or will be sent, post-paid, to any address in the United States, Canada or Mexico, on receipt of price.

F. TENNYSON NEELY,
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September 8th, 1895.

Dear Mr. Neely:

I return, with thanks, the manuscript of the translation of "The Right to Love." It is very well done. I have found it necessary to change but a few words. I beg to express to the translator my gratitude.

With regard to pirated editions of some of my earlier books, I thank you very much for your kind advice and am quite willing to leave matters entirely in your own hands.

You are on the spot and you know better than I the best course to take to defend my interests. By this time you know that "The Farce of Feeling" is the novel I call in English "The Comedy of Sentiment," for which we have already agreed as to the publication of an American edition by you.

Of my new novels you shall hear all particulars as soon as I think it desirable and advantageous to put them before the public.

With kindest regards I am,

Yours very sincerely,

D. N. Nordan.

To F. TENNYSON NEELY, Esq.,
114 Fifth Ave., N. Y.

534774

LIBRARY

DEDICATED TO
HER EXCELLENCY MADAM OLGA VON NOVIKOFF
BORN VON KIRÉEFF
BY
THE AUTHOR

IN PLACE OF A PREFACE.

To HER EXCELLENCE MADAM VON
NORDAU OF MOSCOW.

My kind friend:

If I write your name in the pediment of this book, it is not because I am persuaded that I “*χαρίεντ’ ἐπὶ νηὸν ἔρεψα*” you (you can be addressed in the language of Homer), but because in your amiability and unduly great modesty you assure me that you do not consider the play unworthy of you. Therefore I beg you to see in my dedication no overweening self-appreciation, but a proof, though inadequate, of the reverence which I pay to your mind, your soul, your character.

You certainly do not suspect, my gracious friend, that this dedication has prevented my doing something which afterwards I should probably have regretted.

“The Right to Love” has met with the most

favorable reception on every German stage upon which it has been produced—true, the number is not yet large. Prominent and weighty periodicals have praised it with little reservation and without stint. Yet a few contemptible mortals who (by their own confession) wished to avenge themselves upon the author of “*Degeneration*,” have made the greatest efforts to stifle it under falsehoods, calumny, and vulgarity.

I know that a sensible man ought to have nothing to do with such persons. Yet I was on the eve of succumbing to the temptation of dealing with these worthless folk in a preface to the edition of my drama in book form.

The thought that the play is to be dedicated to you came to the aid of my reason, and strengthened it for the conquest of temper.

I must not show the noble-minded foreigner, who knows and reveres German literature as the Pantheon of Lessing, Goethe, Schiller, and Heine, the neglected corners of this proud structure.

For the sake of your name I have exercised self-control, and avoided a rashness in which I should have surrendered too much of my dignity. Accept my thanks for the beautiful influence which you have unconsciously exerted, and permit me to lay at your feet this expression of my homage.

MAX NORDAU.

PERSONAGES.

JOSEPH WAHRMUND, Merchant.

OTTO BARDENHOLM, Assessor.

DOCTOR BÜTTNER.

MADAM BERTHA WAHRMUND, wife of
Joseph Wahrmund.

MADAM FRIDORP, her mother.

MADAM BURKHARD, Artist.

MINNA, servant in the Wahrmund family.

LENA, Madam Fridorp's housekeeper.

GOVERNESS in Joseph Wahrmund's employ
(silent).

BESSIE, 7 years old, } Wahrmund's children.

LOUISE, 5 years old, }

PLACE.

In the first scene,
HERINGSDORF.

In the second,
LICHTERFELDS.

In the third and the fourth,
BERLIN.

TIME.

THE PRESENT DAY.

No interval between the third and the fourth
acts.

THE RIGHT TO LOVE.

ACT I.

Veranda in front of Wahrmund's villa at Heringsdorf. The back and the left-hand wall are half glass. The back affords a view of the sea, the left a stretch of the beach and the downs. In the centre of the back wall is a door to which three steps lead from the outside. At the right is a door leading into the living-rooms of the villa. In the right-hand corner at the back is a round table, and in the right-hand corner at the front stands a square one. At the left are several arm-chairs and rocking-chairs.

SCENE I.

MINNA. WAHRMUND.

Minna.

(Holds a duster in her hand and is putting the furniture in order.)

Wahrmund.

(Shaking the veranda door on the outside, then rapping on the panes.)

Minna! oh, Minna!

Minna (*calling*).

Yes, yes; I'm coming directly. (*Runs to the door and opens it.*)

Wahrmund (*entering*).

Why, confound it, who has locked this door again? I said that it was always to be left open during the day!

Minna (*moving the chairs about*).

Yes, but my mistress ordered us to keep it locked.

Wahrmund.

(Puts his hat and sun umbrella on the round table. Grumbling.)

Always the same story. I never can have my own way. Has nothing come from Berlin?

Minna.

Yes, a box. (*She brings it from the square table.*)

Wahrmund.

Ah! That's it.

Minna.

Shall I open it?

Wahrmund.

I'll attend to that myself. (*Takes out a pen-knife.*)

Minna.

I'll get a kitchen knife.

Wahrmund.

That isn't necessary. It's very lightly nailed. But you can bring a large glass of water.

Minna.

(*Exit through the door at the right.*)

Wahrmund.

(*Prying open the lid of the box with his pen-knife.*)

I was afraid it might come too late—*snap*—Deuce take the blade! Well, no harm done—if the thing only pleases Bertha.

Minna.

(*Enters with a tumbler of water.*)

Wahrmund (*raising the lid*).

There! Perfectly fresh. Put the glass on the table. (*He takes out of the box a large bouquet of gypsophila and, after removing the sheet of paper wrapped around it, places it carefully in the tumbler, and gives the paper to Minna.*) Throw that away.

Minna (*exit*).

Wahrmund.

(*Takes his hat and umbrella from the round table, on which the bouquet now stands alone, and carries it to the square table. Here he looks at the mail which has been delivered, three letters and two newspapers. He puts one of the letters back on the table, tucks the newspapers, after tearing off the wrappers, under his arm, opens the letters, hastily glances over the lines, and thrusts them into his pocket at the entrance of Bertha and Bardenholm.*)

SCENE II.

WAHRMUND. BERTHA. BARDENHOLM.

(Bertha enters through the door at the right; Bardenholm follows her.)

Bertha.

Oh! It's very warm again to-day. *(Sits down in an arm-chair at the left and fans herself with her handkerchief.)*

Bardenholm.

We walked rapidly. And it is tiresome to wade through the sand.

Bertha.

(Has taken off her hat and rises to put it down.)

Bardenholm.

Oh, permit me! *(Eagerly takes her hat from her hand and hurries to the round table with it.)*

Bertha.

(Gazing out through the glass and speaking over her shoulder to Wahr mund.) No letters to-day?

Wahrmund.

One from your mother. (*Gives it to her.*)

Bertha.

(*Takes and opens it without looking at Wahrmund.*)

Wahrmund (*standing beside her*).

Well? What does mother write? Is she well? Will she come?

Bertha (*ungraciously*).

How am I to guess the contents? Let me read it first.

Wahrmund (*aside to Bardenholm*).

My wife is nervous again to-day.

Bardenholm.

We must deal with her so much the more tenderly. Michelet says: "Woman is a wounded creature."

Wahrmund.

Michelet is a simpleton.

Bardenholm.

Oh, no! Michelet is a finely strung artist nature.

Wahrmund.

(With good-humored sarcasm.)

Yes, he can be called that, too.

Bertha.

(Putting the letter into her pocket.)

Mother sends her love. She is well, but too
lazy to come here.

Wahrmund.

Indeed! Well! As she chooses. It was
your idea. I thought at once that the sea air
would not be good for her rheumatism.

Bertha.

Of course, your opinions are always exactly
the reverse of mine.

Wahrmund.

Never mind, Bertha. We won't dispute
over it. But—where are you leaving your
hat again?

Bardenholm.

*(Who has officiously brought a stool and placed
it at Bertha's feet, starting up.)*

Pardon me. There wasn't a speck of dust

on the table when I put the hat there. I treat the lady's belongings reverently.

Bertha (*sharply to Wahrmund*).

I really think you would do better to attend to your own affairs.

Wahrmund (*pleasantly*).

There you go again. I only said it to make you look over there.

Bertha.

(*Glances at the round table. Springing up and running to it.*)

Oh, how charming! This is too lovely. (*Taking the bouquet and examining it.*) But who told you that gypsophila was my favorite flower?

Bardenholm (*hesitatingly*).

Oh—I?—how—

Bertha.

You probably sent to Berlin for it? Such a bouquet cannot be had here.

Bardenholm.

Unfortunately I am not the giver—I deeply regret it.

Bertha (*astonished*).

You are not the giver? Then who—

Wahrmund (*smiling*).

I suppose you will not think of me?

Bertha (*disappointed*).

You? (*Puts the bouquet down and returns to her arm-chair.*)

Wahrmund (*as before*).

Does it gratify you less now?

Bertha (*irritably*).

Don't talk nonsense! At any rate I thank you. What put it into your head so suddenly?

Wahrmund.

Don't you know what day this is?

Bertha (*looking at him*).

Monday—

Wahrmund.

No—I mean the date.

Bertha (*wonderingly*).

The second of August—(*after a brief pause of reflection, carelessly*)—oh, yes.

Wahrmund (*to Bardenholm*).
Our wedding-day.

Bertha (*with a forced smile*).
That's such an old story.

Wahrmund.
(*Approaching and trying to embrace her, gallantly.*)

It will ever remain new to me.

Bertha (*repulsing him*).
Don't! You know I don't like tender speeches.

Wahrmund (*stepping back*).
It has not always been so. When, eight years ago to-day, we took the night train for Munich—the full moon was shining into the carriage windows—we did not sleep—

Bertha.
Don't be so wanting in good taste.

Wahrmund.
Well, well, don't be troubled; I shan't compromise you.

Bardenholm.

(Who meanwhile has been looking at the bouquet.)

A charming little flower. What do you call it?

Bertha.

Gypsophila.

Wahrmund.

And in the Tyrol—the evening in the herdsman's hut—when you heard the cow-bells tinkling in the distance. Do you remember how sentimental you were then?

Bertha.

I remember nothing.

Wahrmund.

Nonsense—you are only pretending—such moments are never forgotten.

Bertha.

I recollect only one thing—that during the whole journey I was terribly homesick for my mother.

Wahrmund.

I thank you. Very complimentary to me.

(To Bardenholm.) If I may give you a bit of advice, my dear Assessor: don't marry. Believe me: don't marry.

Bardenholm.

But your example is not calculated to alarm me. If one could be sure of faring as you——

Wahrmund.

Yes, yes. Everything looks far more beautiful from a bird's-eye view.

Bertha.

You are right to complain. You know, if you long for liberty——

Wahrmund.

Bravo! Now you are turning me out of doors. A strange celebration of this anniversary.

Bardenholm.

You worship dates, Wahrmund.

Wahrmund.

Certain dates.

Bardenholm.

That comes from the holy awe of the middle and the last. It's a mercantile custom.

Bertha.

A Philistine custom.

Wahrmund.

Philistine! Mercantile! A prosaic paraphrase of Schiller's words. Ah, may love be forever verdant—well, I must say—

Bertha (*turning the conversation*).

Oh, look! there's another man shooting the sea-gulls. It's abominable to allow it.

Bardenholm (*approaching her*).

Are you not a little intolerant? Why grudge the poor jaded residents of the great cities, who come here to rest their worn-out nerves, a little pleasure in shooting?

Wahrmund.

(*Goes to the bouquet, passes his hand over it, takes a chair, and opens a newspaper; but from time to time glances at the two speakers.*)

Bertha.

Fie, how heartless! Have you no pity for the poor birds? They animate the landscape so bewitchingly, when they soar through the

air or hover over the sea. Why not let the pretty creatures enjoy their lives?

Bardenholm (*laughing*).

Madam, one could worship your artless egotism.

Bertha.

Egotism? Because I would like to protect the gulls from cruel sportsmen?

Bardenholm.

Certainly. Unconscious egotism, it is true. You make yourself the advocate of the gulls, not on their account, but your own. They afford you pleasure. You enjoy watching their graceful flight, the picturesque white speck relieved against the pale blue sky and the dark blue sea.

Bertha.

Is that wrong?

Bardenholm.

Not at all. Selfishness is not wrong. I consider healthy egotism natural and justifiable. For our object in life is to obtain as many pleasurable emotions as possible. But

do you not say to yourself that the hunter derives as much pleasure from his game as you do from the sight of the sailing gulls?

Bertha.

The world is not created solely for the sportsman.

Bardenholm.

Nor solely for you. Egotism confronts egotism, and the stronger is in the right.

Bertha.

The stronger conquers.

Bardenholm.

Conquers, or is in the right—it's the same thing.

Wahrmund.

I must remark—I don't look at it from so lofty a philosophical standpoint, but practically—that shooting gulls seems to me an innocent amusement.

Bardenholm (*sneeringly*).

Because the gulls are not marketable creatures?

Wahr mund.

No. Because the sportsman on the beach
doesn't hit them.

SCENE III.

THE SAME. MADAM BURKHARD. DR.
BÜTTNER.

Madam Burkhard.

(Appears at the door of the veranda and half opens it. She is dressed with elegant simplicity—a red-and-white silk blouse, a loosely-tied blue cravat, and a velvet cap on her short curly hair.)

May we come in?

Bertha.

(Rising and going to meet her.)

Certainly, Madam Burkhard, certainly.

Madam Burkhard (entering).

Good morning. (Shakes hands with Bertha. Wahr mund bows without rising, and continues to read the paper. Dr. Büttner appears at the open door of the veranda and bows. Barden-

holm shakes hands with him. Then he goes up to Wahr mund, who holds out one finger to him. To Bertha.) You have been taking a drill in walking to-day, as I saw just now.

Bertha.

Yes, we were up on the downs and are quite tired. (*To Madam Burkhard.*) Meanwhile, you have probably been employed in a less military fashion.

Madam Burkhard.

I've been working a little.

Bertha.

What progress have you made with your sunset? It promised to be very beautiful.

Madam Burkhard.

It is going on very well. I have still several days to paint on it.

Bertha.

But won't you sit down a little while?

Madam Burkhard.

No, thank you. I am going directly.

Bertha.

Just a minute.

Madam Burkhard.

If you insist upon it. (*Sits down. Bertha does the same.*)

Büttner.

Is there anything interesting in the papers, Wahrmund?

Wahrmund (*coldly*).

I don't think that we are interested in the same subjects. If you would like to have the paper—

Büttner.

Oh, no, thank you. I am glad that I'm not obliged to read any here. (*Chats with Bardenholm.*)

Madam Burkhard (*to Bertha*).

It's time to go in bathing. Won't you join me, Madam Wahrmund?

Bertha.

No. I'm not going in to-day.

Madam Burkhard.

Indeed? What a pity! Then I must act the siren all alone. It's too stupid. Well, you'll never catch me at a German resort again. This ridiculous separation of the sexes—that's why I like Ostend and Trouville.

Bertha.

My husband has never wanted to go there with me.

Madam Burkhard.

Probably he prefers to go alone.

Wahrmund.

You are mistaken, madam. Immodesty affords me no amusement.

Madam Burkhard.

Immodesty? Because friends can bathe together? Because a woman is permitted to have strong and attentive protectors? You are a famous swimmer and diver—don't you regret that you can't go into the water with your wife?

Wahrmund.

Most men hardly go to Ostend and Trouville to bathe with their own wives.

Madam Burkhard.

And suppose they don't? What of it? Do not women dance with strangers? And are we not less covered in a ball-gown than in a bathing-dress?

Wahrmund.

With your opinions, madam, you must like Cameron even better than Ostend and Trouville.

Madam Burkhard.

Why?

Wahrmund.

Because there men and women have even less restraint while bathing—namely, no bathing costumes at all. I suppose that is your ideal?

Madam Burkhard.

There you are very much mistaken. It might do with savages, but civilized people are so ugly naked.

Wahrmund.

But if they were sufficiently beautiful it would disturb you no further?

Madam Burkhard.

Not in the least.

Wahrmund.

I cannot soar to that height of absence of prejudice. And—don't take offence at my frankness—I cannot appreciate it in others.

Bertha.

My husband is so terribly narrow-minded in these matters.

Wahrmund.

Thank the Lord for it!

Madam Burkhard.

Don't be imposed upon, dear Madam Wahrmund. Gentlemen merely pretend that they think so. Men and women bathing in the sea together—fie, how improper! But to lie on the downs for hours watching us through a spyglass—that's perfectly right. Their rigid morality permits it.

Wahrmund.

That doesn't hit me, for I——

Madam Burkhard.

No. I am speaking in general terms, merely to show you that people here are not one whit better than in Ostend and Trouville. We are only a little more hypocritical and sanctimonious. But I believe in frankness. (*Rising.*) So, as you can't come with me (*Bertha makes a gesture of regret with her hand*), I must go alone to join the angels of virtue. Farewell till we next meet.

(*Exit. Büttner, after bowing, follows her.*)

SCENE IV.

WAHRMUND. BERTHA. BARDENHOLM.

Wahrmund.

Frankness! She believes in frankness. I call it shamelessness.

Bertha (*vehemently*).

How can you use such a word!

Wahrmund.

Do you want to uphold the woman? She is an abomination to me.

Bertha.

And you show it plainly enough. You are actually rude to the lady.

Wahrmund.

Well, at the worst she won't come here again. *That* misfortune can be endured.

Bertha.

I should deeply regret it. She is a beautiful, clever, talented woman. I prize her acquaintance.

Wahrmund.

I hope it will end when we leave here.

Bertha.

Perhaps you will forbid me to be in her society?

Wahrmund (*gravely*).

You are no child, and I have nothing to forbid. But you must perceive yourself that this woman is no companion for you.

Bardenholm.

Excuse my interrupting this exchange of opinions——

Wahrmund.

Yes. Express yourself——

Bardenholm.

Since the acquaintance came through me, you really judge Madam Burkhard too severely.

Bertha.

Unjust and unkind.

Bardenholm.

She is an artist of reputation.

Wahrmund.

A woman of reputation, too, but—a bad one.

Bardenholm.

Good heavens! we must allow artists to have a somewhat freer view of life.

Wahrmund.

H'm. Yes. So say all the dissolute women who strum or daub a little.

Bardenholm.

Madam Burkhard is no amateur.

Wahrmund.

I don't say that she is. But I don't believe that her pictures are any the better because she smokes, uses doubtful language, and drags her lover about with her like a poodle.

Bardenholm.

Artistic activity requires play of feeling and imagination, and they probably exclude commonplace matronly propriety.

Wahrmund.

Indeed? Well, according to my knowledge, the patroness of music is a saint, and some of the greatest artists of the Renaissance—I've forgotten their names, it's true—were monks.

Bardenholm.

Morality is somewhat conventional. Society really does overlook much in the more active emotional life and more vivid power of imagination of artists. The code of laws of morality has a special paragraph for them. So we

are not justified in condemning them as immoral for acts which probably would be so in others.

Bertha.

Madam Burkhard visits the best families.

Wahrmund.

Yes, people who would struggle for Beelzebub himself, if he should chance to be the fashion.

Bertha.

Beelzebub—no, really, that is exasperating !
So an artist—

Wahrmund.

For aught I care she may be a female Raphael. I insist that that does not justify her in creating a public scandal.

Bertha.

Public. That is the point. She just answered that remark in advance. You want sham and hypocrisy. Her crime is that she does not dissimulate.

Wahrmund.

Certainly. That is her crime. And it is a

serious one. Her wretched flirtations with her Dr. Büttner concern her and her relatives. They are nothing to me, so long as she keeps them out of sight, as decency requires. But when she flaunts these miserable scandals before the eyes of the world they become my affair. They inflict a personal injury upon me, by, for instance, unsettling my wife's ideas of morality.

Bertha.

You need not fear that. I know perfectly well what to think of Madam Burkhard.

Wahrmund.

Indeed ! Well, out with your opinion.

Bertha (*excitedly*).

I think that she is a brave woman. She loves a man and has the courage to acknowledge her love. She could as easily assume the semblance of virtue as all the secret sinners in fashionable drawing-rooms, whose affairs, as you say, are no concern of yours. But she despairs to do so. She is too proud to play such a farce for the sake of other people.

Wahrmund.

But—Bertha! You forget that the woman is married.

Bertha.

I do not forget it. Her husband is a horror. A dull-witted vulgarian, who does not understand this woman.

Wahrmund.

What this woman wants is not difficult to understand.

Bertha.

No. She wants her share of the joys of life. She wants happiness and love. That is the first and most sacred right of every creature.

Wahrmund.

My dear Assessor, what must you think when you hear my wife talk in this way!

Bardenholm.

Oh, I think that she allows herself to be carried away by her natural generosity, and, perhaps, takes up the cause of the accused woman rather more energetically than—

Bertha.

What, Assessor Bardenholm, don't you agree with me?

Bardenholm.

Yes, that is—

Wahrmund.

Oh, then I *am* curious—

Bardenholm.

The fact is, that Madam Burkhard is perhaps somewhat imprudent. She might make some concessions to prevailing custom.

Bertha.

Yes, yes ; hide, dissemble, lie—

Wahrmund.

I consider discretion a mitigating circumstance of depravity.

Bertha.

Bravo ! That's the pocket edition of your Philistine morality.

Wahrmund.

I should like to know yours.

Bertha.

I make no secret of it. The command of the heart stands first.

Wahrmund.

And what of the ten commandments?

Bardenholm.

They are not up-to-date.

Bertha.

Madam Burkhard loves Dr. Büttner.

Wahrmund.

Then she ought to get a divorce from her husband and marry him. That's the purpose for which the law of divorce was invented.

Bertha.

Perhaps her husband cannot do without her. Perhaps he is willing to permit everything if only he can keep her, and she remains out of compassion for him.

Bardenholm.

That happens sometimes.

Wahrmund.

What happens far more frequently is that the poor man has blind confidence in his wife and that she basely deceives him. But no matter—Madam Burkhard can go to the deuce with her Büttner. I am only sorry that you speak of the rights of this fast woman. When people marry and have children, they have no rights, nothing but anathematized duty, and the obligation of being respectable.

Bertha.

That is monstrous. So a woman who has the misfortune to be married—

Wahrmund.

She probably sought the misfortune very zealously—

Bertha.

Must cease to be a thinking, feeling creature—she must have no heart, no brain, no eyes—she must become a chattel—

Wahrmund.

Enough. Drop the subject before the children.

SCENE V.

THE SAME. BESSIE, LOUISE, AND THE GOVERNESS.

Bessie and Louise enter through the door at the right, where the governess remains standing. Louise goes to Bardenholm, who takes her in his lap and pets her.

Bessie (*to Bertha*).

Mamma, may we go and look for shells?

Bertha.

Yes, child. (*Kisses her*.)

Bessie.

(*Exit. Stopping in the middle of the veranda.*)

May we go bare-foot?

Bertha.

Yes, child.

Bessie.

(*Claps her hands joyfully, runs to a chair, sits down, and begins to take off her shoes.*)

Bertha.

(*Starting up and hastening to her.*)

Not here! Fie, how naughty! Come, I'll

take off your shoes and stockings. (*Exit with both children through the door at the right.*)

SCENE VI.

WAHRMUND. BARDENHOLM.

Bardenholm.

They are charming children.

Wahrmund.

Yes. With two such rosy little faces in the house—one knows for what he is living.

Bardenholm.

So we ought to marry.

Wahrmund.

Of course—if we desire to have children; only we must clearly understand one thing: Those who once possess children must sacrifice everything to them—*independence, liberty, inclinations, everything*, and consider their prosperity sufficient compensation for every sacrifice. Whoever cannot be content with this does wrong to bring children into the world.

SCENE VII.

THE SAME. BERTHA. THE CHILDREN.
THE GOVERNESS.

Bertha enters with an embroidery frame; the children follow bare-footed. They run merrily across the veranda and out through the central door. The governess follows.

Bertha.

(Calling after them through the door.)

But don't go into the water. Be good and stay on the beach. And come back here at one o'clock. *(Returns to her chair.)*

Bardenholm.

(Looks after the children.)

Wahrmund.

You ought not to have let the little ones go alone.

Bertha.

The governess is with them.

Wahrmund.

She is a little clumsy. You should not depend upon her.

Bertha.

Ah ! Now you want to teach me my maternal duties.

Wahrmund (*after a short pause*).

Do you know I am sorry that your mother is not coming ?

Bertha.

All at once ?

Wahrmund.

Yes. Perhaps she might have put you in a somewhat better humor.

Bertha.

Whose fault is it that I am out of temper ?

Wahrmund.

Well, that *is* good. (*Rises, approaches Bar-denholm and also looks after the children. After another pause.*) I don't feel quite easy. I'll watch them myself.

Bertha.

You are at liberty to do so.

Wahrmund.

(*Takes his hat and sun umbrella. Patting*

Bardenholm on the shoulder as he passes out.)
Don't marry, Assessor; take my advice, don't
marry (*exit*).

SCENE VIII.

BARDENHOLM. BERTHA.

Bardenholm (*calling after him*).

No danger, my dear Wahrmund. (*Watches him a short time, then pushes a chair beside Bertha, who has begun to embroider, and sits down. After a short pause, during which he has watched her.*) Did you invite your mother to come here?

Bertha (*without looking up*).

Yes.

Bardenholm.

You naughty angel. Then we should never
have been a moment alone.

Bertha.

That was the very reason.

Bardenholm.

But why should you grudge me these brief
minutes of happiness?

Bertha.

I am afraid.

Bardenholm.

Afraid ? Of me ?

Bertha.

Of you. Of myself.

Bardenholm.

Have we ever done any wrong ?

Bertha.

No. It is not that.

Bardenholm.

Does it harm any one if often during the day I sit on the sand at your feet and read aloud to you, or if in the evening we stroll over the downs, gazing silently out at the sea, glittering in the moonlight, and I feel your warm hand on my arm ? Is it not sweet ?

Bertha.

Too sweet ; too dangerously sweet. (*A short pause.*) I have often intended to say : Go, Bardenholm. Leave Heringsdorf. I often think I have the power to ask this of you—in the

morning, when I rise ; before I have seen you. Then you come, you speak to me, and I cannot. Bardenholm, you ought to do it unasked. You ought to have pity on me.

Bardenholm.

Have pity on *me*. I love you, Bertha.
(*Moves close to her and clasps her hand.*)

Bertha (*quickly withdraws it*).

Sit a little farther away. (*Bardenholm sighing, moves back.*) You ought not to say that to me, Bardenholm.

Bardenholm.

Yet, just now you yourself so eloquently defended the right of every human being to love and happiness. You were so bewitching. I longed to kneel before you and kiss your feet.

Bertha.

When I speak so, I am really trying to convince myself. But I have never yet wholly succeeded.

Bardenholm.

Have prejudices power over you, you who

think so independently, judge so unrestrainedly—over such a free, broad soul?

Bertha.

Prejudices—I believe I could conquer them.
It is not that.

Bardenholm.

If not, what is it, then?

Bertha.

Bardenholm, I cannot lie. I cannot dissimulate. I can do nothing secretly and hide it from others.

Bardenholm.

That is a noble trait in your character, but it must not be exaggerated. We live in a society of dull Philistines and hypocrites. If we offend their prejudices, they crush us. Society is stronger than we. It is an honorable warfare, if we use against it the only weapon at our command to fight the thousand-eyed, thousand-tongued, thousand-fisted monster: a little shrewdness and caution. (*A short pause.*) You do not employ them enough. That is wrong. If I may be permitted to say so to

you, you really treat Wahrmund too badly.
It must finally make him suspicious.

Bertha.

I am sorry for it myself afterwards—but what can I do? It is stronger than my will. This dull, contented composure, this lack of perception that I am struggling, wavering, suffering, are enough to drive one mad. I should often like to shriek aloud, to cry out to his face: “Are you blind? Are you deaf? Don’t you see that you are losing me? Why don’t you defend yourself?”

Bardenholm.

He certainly has confidence.

Bertha.

I don’t thank him for it. Such confidence is an insult. I am not old, I am not uglier than other women——

Bardenholm (*moving nearer*).

You are bewitching——

Bertha.

Sit a little further away. He ought to know

that I can be exposed to temptation. But he doesn't trouble himself about it. He is so sure of victory—so grotesquely self-complacent—it is unbearable !

Bardenholm.

But so convenient. He himself invited me to spend the vacation here with you.

Bertha.

Convenient ! Convenient ! I don't value this convenience. And you, Bardenholm ?

Bardenholm.

Good heavens ! everything has two sides. On the one hand, it would certainly be more agreeable to me if he were suspicious and brutal—then I could defy and contend with him—that would be chivalrous—I should stand in a finer attitude. But for you, for your peace, it is surely better as it is.

Bertha.

For my peace ! Do you believe that I could be at ease when I knew that I was deceiving some one ? Would you be untroubled with

such a consciousness? Would you be able to clasp my husband's hand if—— (*hesitates.*)

Bardenholm.

I love you, Bertha, and I see nothing else. That is the nature of the struggle for women ; it rages even between brothers. Love is stronger than any bond of friendship. And, finally, why should I have scruples? I am robbing your husband of nothing. He has had the fairest years of your life, your fresh youth and innocence.

Bertha.

Ah ! Bardenholm, do not remind me of it.

Bardenholm.

He has his children, who are all in all to him and who supply the place of everything. He told me so just now. He never possessed your heart, your soul.

Bertha.

Never, Bardenholm, I swear it. There has always been a void within—the world believed me happy because I lived comfortably,

wore pretty dresses, entertained, went to watering-places. Our marriage was considered a model one—and all the time I felt that I was wandering alone at night in a wilderness with neither companion, path, nor goal. There was a sense of dissatisfaction which never left me. I had a constant longing for something unknown. I lacked—I knew not what. Now I do know. (*In a lower tone.*) I knew it on the evening when you were first introduced to me.

Bardenholm.

Oh, Bertha! And yet—?

Bertha.

I dare not. If I were free—alas! Mothers do not know what they are doing when they marry their daughters to the first comer, merely to know that they are provided for. Then, if the right man comes, it is too late.

Bardenholm.

That can no longer be changed. Let us at least take from life what we can still obtain.

(He moves nearer, seizes her hand, and kisses it passionately. She withdraws it.)

Bertha.

Take what we can still obtain. Yes, yes. A single moment of rapture. And what then?

Bardenholm.

What then? We shall always have had this moment. And its memory will be ours forever.

Bertha.

A sorrow's crown of sorrow is the thought of happier things.

Bardenholm.

That is a paradox which Dante brought into fashion. It is wholly false. A sunny memory will illumine an entire life.

Bertha.

Will a sunny memory satisfy you?

Bardenholm.

It must, if I can have nothing more.

Bertha.

It will not suffice for me. So (*beseechingly*) leave me, Bardenholm. It is better so. For you as well as for me. There are so many girls who are free, who can love you, make you happy; why choose me, who—

Bardenholm.

Because I love you and no one else.

Bertha.

For how long?

Bardenholm.

Forever.

Bertha.

You say that. And later—you will have one more conquest on your list, while my portion will be despair. No, no.

Bardenholm.

You are cruel, cruel, cruel!

Bertha.

Cruel! Because I deny myself happiness to have peace? (*very tenderly.*) Bardenholm, why do you ask what is impossible? Why

will you not remain my friend as before?
(*Bardenholm, disappointed, draws back a little.*) It is so beautiful a relation, so pure and free from reproach. I will be your most devoted friend, your most grateful pupil. You enlarge my circle of vision—you develop my intellect—you open to me the perception of everything beautiful. Bardenholm, I have always felt the greatest pleasure when you read aloud and explained anything to me and when we went together into the old Museum and I learned to see through your eyes all the beauties which will remain forever hidden from the dull Philistine. After such hours I have never felt remorse. Why should it not remain so always?

Bardenholm.

Ask your own heart, your own nerves, whether that would be possible. Do not try to rebel against the most powerful law of nature. It is infinitely stronger than our poor will.

Bertha.

But surely it ought not to be so. I must

not be yours. Ah, if I had but known you earlier, when I was free, or never! I am too good for a mere caprice. Yet I cannot be more to you.

Bardenholm.

A caprice, Bertha! What proof of my love do you desire? What can I do to convince you? Do you want my life? Is it my fault that you are not free? Is it not my despair? (*Bertha secretly wipes her eyes.*) It haunts me day and night. I strive to relieve my heart in verse, but it is of no avail.

Bertha (*looking up eagerly*).

Oh, have you written another poem? Oh, pray, pray read it, Bardenholm.

Bardenholm.

(*Draws a sheet of paper from his pocket and reads, simply, but with deep emotion.*).

Fain would I battle for thy sake.

But may I dare?

I must my voice a whisper make,
Thy name to bear.

Fain would I shout in ringing tone,
“Come, love! Be mine!”
Did I not see “No” written on
Thy face divine.

Fain would I earn, mine own, for thee,
Thy daily food.
What joy to gain, 'mid penury,
Thy livelihood—
Show thee the might of my strong arm!
But when I see
His and thy children's eyes, alarm
And grief meet me.

What may I dare then? From afar
Only love thee,
E'en as we love some distant star,
All hopelessly;
Think with fond yearning of thee, Sweet,
And grieve o'er fate,
While sobbing vainly at thy feet,
“Too late! Too late!”

Bertha (*mournfully*).

Too late, too late—Oh, Otto, Otto!

Bardenholm.

(Starts up and tries to embrace her.)

Bertha.

(Also rises hastily and moves several steps away.)

For heaven's sake, take care! We are in a glass house.

Bardenholm.

(Lets himself fall into the chair, sighing heavily.)

Unfortunately.

Bertha.

(With her forehead pressed against the glass wall.)

Happily.

(The curtain falls.)

ACT II.

(Madam Fridorp's drawing-room. Plainly furnished in homely style. Flowers. Cage with canaries. Doors at the right and rear. Two windows at the left.)

SCENE I.

MADAM FRIDORP. LENA.

(Madam Fridorp sits at a window embroidering. Lena stands before her.)

Lena.

(Takes a large fish out of a basket which she has set on the floor.)

Just look at this pike. Isn't he a beauty, a royal pike? Isn't he a splendid fellow?

Madam Fridorp.

Yes, Lena, indeed he is.

Lena.

He's fit for the king's table. And he cost

sixty cents. What do you suppose the fish-wife asked for him?

Madam Fridorp.

Well?

Lena.

She asked seventy-five. "What!" I said, "seventy-five cents for a pike? Maybe he's a titled pike?" "So he is," she said. I offered her thirty cents, and she abused me roundly. But I paid her back in her own coin, and at last she let me have him for sixty cents. Isn't that splendid?

Madam Fridorp.

Yes, Lena.

Lena.

No one can get such good bargains as I. You say so yourself.

Madam Fridorp.

That's true, Lena.

Lena.

(Taking two apples out of the basket.)

And just see these apples. They'll tickle the children, though they were a bit dear.

Four pennies apiece. But they were the finest ones in the whole market. And I saved it on the pike.

Madam Fridorp.

(Who has looked out of the window.)

Capital, Lena; but now carry it into the kitchen and go to the door. Mr. Wahrmund is coming.

(Exit Lena with the basket. Directly after, a bell is heard.)

SCENE II.

MADAM FRIDORP. WAHRMUND. LENA.

(Wahrmund enters. Lena follows him. Madam Fridorp goes to meet Wahrmund. Both shake hands cordially.)

Wahrmund.

Good morning, mother. How are you? Well?

Madam Fridorp.

Did you come alone?

Wahrmund.

Bertha and the children will take the next

train. I wanted to get here before them.
Well, how have you been?

Madam Fridorp.

Very well, thank you.

Lena.

She says so, Mr. Wahrmund. But my
mistress has had her rheumatic pains again
terribly.

Wahrmund.

Has she? Poor mother. Next year we'll
go to Wildbad with you.

Lena.

Yes, that will do her good.

Madam Fridorp.

No, no. You shall not go to any dull
springs on my account. How brown you
have grown at the seashore!

Lena.

Like the dragoons after the manœuvres, sir.

Wahrmund.

My wife will bring you something, Lena.

Lena.

Thank you kindly, sir. She is a darling.
What is it?

Wahrmund.

You'll see presently. This trifle is for you, mother. (*Gives her a gold locket.*)

Madam Fridorp.

No—really—you ought not. (*Has opened the locket.*) Charming—Bertha in the middle, Bessie and Louise leaning against her—you behind them—you are a little indistinct.

Wahrmund.

I am a minor consideration. If only Bertha and the children are good.

Lena.

(*Who has looked over Madam Fridorp's shoulder.*)

Indeed they are. Little Louise is so sweet that a body would like to bite her.

Madam Fridorp.

Yes, Lena, but go now, or you won't have everything ready.

Lena.

Oh, there's no trouble about that. One, two, three, and away. You know how I manage. (*Exit.*)

SCENE III.

MADAM FRIDORP. WAHRMUND.

Wahrmund.

It was time.

Madam Fridorp.

One must have patience with an old servant. Just think, I've had her for thirty-two years.

Wahrmund.

Yes.—It was a pity you did not come, mother. You would have liked Heringsdorf. (*Sits down.*)

Madam Fridorp.

Oh, you are really too kind—but I am not fond of travelling.

Wahrmund.

Travelling! That little railway journey!

Madam Fridorp.

I am happiest in my own home, with my flowers and my birds. They need me.

Wahrmund.

And I?

Madam Fridorp.

You? You have each other, you have your children, your friends. A dull old woman can only be in your way.

Wahrmund.

(Clasping her hand and kissing it.)

How can you talk so, mother. You know that you have never been in our way, and now less than ever. You would not have been superfluous at Heringsdorf.

Madam Fridorp.

How could I have served you?

Wahrmund.

I will tell you, mother.

SCENE IV.

Lena.

(Comes in with the fish.)

I must show you the pike which you are to eat to-night, Mr. Wahrmund ; isn't he a splendid fellow ?

Wahrmund.

Yes ; but I shall not stay to supper.

Madame Fridorp and Lena.

(At the same time).

You won't stay ? What—you won't stay, Mr. Wahrmund ?

Wahrmund.

No. I must go back to town.

Lena.

And won't Madam Bertha be here either ?

Wahrmund.

Yes ; my wife and the children will enjoy your pike.

Lena.

Well, that *was* a scare. What should we

have done with the splendid fish and the roast duck? People take so much trouble to get a nice supper—just ask my mistress now.

Madam Fridorp.

Very well, Lena; but now go.

Lena.

Yes, I am going at once. Too bad, too bad, that Mr. Wahrmund won't stay. (*Exit.*)

Madam Fridorp.

What were we saying?

Wahrmund.

I was telling you that you would have been very useful in Heringsdorf.

Lena (*rushing in again*).

One thing more, sir. I know very well how my mistress got her rheumatism again. (*Wahrmund rises and paces excitedly up and down.*) She's constantly at my heels. (*She follows close behind Wahrmund.*) In the cellar, in the damp laundry—everywhere. Talk to her about it, Mr. Wahrmund. She won't listen to me. When a lady has a Lena, she can depend upon

her, and need not make herself ill by watching and—

Wahrmud (*vehemently*).

Confound it, this really ought—can't we have a moment undisturbed?

Lena.

(*Stands still in the middle of the room, with her mouth wide open in amazement.*)

Madam Fridorp (*soothingly*).

Go, Lena, go, and don't come back until I call you.

Wahrmund.

(*Furiously to Lena, who still stands motionless, looking from one to the other.*)

Didn't you understand? You are to go, and stay outside till you are called.

Lena.

(*Exit, banging the door violently behind her.*)

SCENE V.

MADAM FRIDORP. WAHRMUND.

Wahrmund.

(Still pacing up and down.)

It's enough to drive one mad. I came by an earlier train in order to talk with you a few minutes alone—and now this silly gabbler!

Madam Fridorp.

Come, come, don't be so upset by it. She'll stay outside now. My good Lena is a little forward. We have always had a great deal of patience with her.

Wahrmund.

I am patient, too, but there is a limit to everything. *(Paces up and down several times more and then sits down again.)*

Madam Fridorp.

Well, never mind, it won't happen again. So you thought that I might have been useful in Heringsdorf.

Wahrmund (*significantly*).

Yes. I think it would have done Bertha good to have you with her.

Madam Fridorp.

You say that so strangely—isn't the child well?

Wahrmund.

Oh, yes—that is, as far as I can see. Outwardly there is no evidence that anything is the matter. But perhaps I don't understand it. There may be some hidden evil.

Madam Fridorp.

You alarm me. Speak plainly—what is it?

Wahrmund.

You need not be alarmed, mother. For, as I said, Bertha's bodily health seems excellent. But for some time a change has taken place in her which I can't explain.

Madam Fridorp.

A change! In what does it consist?

Wahrmund (*somewhat hesitatingly*).

I don't know exactly where to begin. Ber-

tha was never what is called a lively person.

Madam Fridorp.

No. She was always grave.

Wahrmund.

She was grave and silent, but pleasant. I could feel that she cared for me, that her heart was mine. She was interested in everything that concerned me. She even asked questions frequently about my business affairs, though she did not understand them.

Madam Fridorp.

How should she?

Wahrmund.

Of course. In short, she evidently regarded my affairs as her own.

Madam Fridorp.

And so they are.

Wahrmund.

I think so too. But now the state of affairs is entirely different. Bertha is constantly out of temper. She does not say a word to me all

day; if I speak to her she scarcely answers, or irritably flings a few nervous words at me; she never looks at me when I enter or leave the room—will you believe it, mother? I can't get her to cast a glance at me. Is this living? Need I submit to it?

Madam Fridorp.

Well, well, I hope it is not so bad as you say. Probably you exaggerate a little.

Wahrmund.

Exaggerate? You know that is not my way. I have intentionally avoided making my colors too dark. I assure you, mother, I don't know what I ought to do. When I ask: "Bertha, what is the matter?" she answers, "Nothing. What should be the matter?" "You are out of spirits," I remark. "I am as I can be. I probably have no reason to rejoice." "What troubles you?" "Let me alone." And that's all I can get out of her. I try to guess her wishes, to anticipate them. I offered lately to increase her pocket money. "I don't spend what I have now." That was

her only reply. I surprise her with gifts of jewelry—she scarcely thanks me, does not look at them, and does not wear them. She has the handsomest gowns, and yet dresses so plainly that she actually reflects discredit upon me.

Madam Fridorp.

You really ought not to blame her for her simplicity.

Wahrmund.

Yes, if it is intended to annoy me.

Madam Fridorp.

That is imagination.

Wahrmund.

No, mother, believe me, it is no imagination.

Madam Fridorp.

I cannot understand it. Perhaps Bertha needs more amusement.

Wahrmund.

I thought so too. But it can't be that. Judge for yourself. I go into society with her, though I would far rather stay at home. I

attend the theatre with her five nights in the week to see the craziest plays, whose authors ought to have their ears boxed. There, it is true, she seems to be happy a few minutes. I am thoroughly enraged, but I stifle it; for I'm satisfied, if only anything pleases her. She goes every day to the Museum and the art exhibitions—I don't object. True, I can't accompany her, for during the day I have no time. Besides, I don't care much for all the modern pictures—but she can go. She has whatever company, too, that she prefers. Then she returns home completely exhausted, and is as irritable as she can be. Can't be touched without gloves. That isn't because she needs more amusement?

Madam Fridorp.

You do not know how much what you tell me grieves me.

Wahrmund.

I have no wish to grieve you, mother; I am pouring out my heart to you because I hope that you will be able to change the condition

of affairs. I don't know how to help myself. Speak a sensible word to Bertha. Bring her to reason. Good heavens! I certainly am not exacting; she really does not have a hard time with me—all I want is peace. I desire no grumbling in my house. After working and worrying all day, I want to see a pleasant face at home. You know, mother, that we have made the acquaintance at Heringsdorf of a Madam Burkhard, an artist, who deceives her husband in the most scandalous way. The man notices nothing, or pretends he does not—his wife is so loving to him. At first I despised the fellow, then I laughed at him; but at last there were moments when I almost asked myself whether it is not more desirable for the husband to have a smooth, ever-smiling sinner, than an intolerably peevish angel of virtue.

Madam Fridorp (*offended*).

How can you even mention Bertha in the same breath with such a person——?

Wahrmund.

Don't be angry, mother. You know how I

reverence Bertha's character—she is your daughter (*he kisses her hand*)—but the comparison forced itself upon me.

Madam Fridorp.

Such a comparison—

Wahrmund.

Besides—it is not so much for my own sake. I am a man, and can endure everything. But it is on account of others. The servants, our acquaintances, the neighbors, must see it. People will talk about us. I won't have it. No gossip, no scandal. That is horrible to me. And the children. Especially the children. Fortunately Louise notices nothing yet. But Bessie is a sensible child. She sees that her mother sits at the table in silence, looking into her plate, and treats me as if I were empty air. She looks surprised and troubled. Mother, this must not be. Such a spectacle will poison her childhood and darken her whole life. She must have no memories of discord in her parents' house. If there is no other way, I would rather send Bertha away to travel with the

children or place the little girls in a boarding-school. They must not see their mother quarrel with their father.

Madam Fridorp.

But how has this happened? You have usually agreed with each other so well.

Wahrmund.

Do I know? (*Rises and goes to the window.*
In a subdued voice—slowly.) I can only tell you that matters have been especially bad during the last few weeks. Bertha even appears to feel a personal abhorrence of me. It is very difficult for me to speak of this, but I ought to confide everything to you; nay, I must. Bertha repulses me—after eight years of wedlock—just think—

Madam Fridorp (*nods sadly*).

Wahrmund.

If I entreat, she says: “Are you not ashamed to beg?” If I grow vehement—you understand that we cannot always control ourselves—she becomes furious, declares that she

is neither an Oriental slave, nor—oh! I don't know what—spare me the repetition of it. Perhaps she will tell, if you question her. What shall I do now? I don't know any course to pursue.

Madam Fridorp.

I cannot explain it. There must be some illness. Perhaps the child is nervous.

Wahrmund.

I have thought of that, too. I was going to consult our physician. But it seemed as if I ought first to tell you.

Madam Fridorp.

I should not like to vex you—but are you perfectly sure that there is not some little fault on your side?

Wahrmund (*wounded*).

Oh, mother!

Madam Fridorp.

Are you not a little vehement—a little irritated?

Wahrmund.

I am not aware of it. You know that I have a quiet nature——

Madam Fridorp.

Yet you were very angry with Lena just now.

Wahrmund (*sharply*).

I see that you are taking Bertha's part in advance. I ought to have expected it. Of course I am the culprit. It's always the lamb that muddies the water.

Madam Fridorp.

You see, now you are getting roused again. I really do not wish to vex you. I am only trying to find an explanation for something which is incomprehensible to me, so it is natural to ask whether you may not——

Wahrmund.

Well, it is certainly possible that the fault is mine; ask her of what she complains. That is why I have come to you. She will surely be frank with her mother, and you will then tell me what troubles her. If it depends

upon me, there shall be a change. That I promise you. I want peace, and the children must have peace and happiness about them. I should almost be glad if it were proved that I am the delinquent. Then I should understand it. Now I cannot explain Bertha's conduct. And it is very uncomfortable to confront something absolutely incomprehensible. (*A bell rings.*) There they are already. Now, mother, you know the state of affairs. Do what you can, I beg you. I hope you can set everything straight.

Madam Fridorp (*presses his hand*).

Rely upon me.

SCENE VI.

THE SAME. BERTHA. BESSIE. LOUISE.
LENA.

Bertha enters with Bessie and Louise, Lena stops at the door and casts timid side glances at Wahrmund. Bertha and the two children run quickly to Madam Fridorp, who has risen, and embrace her. Wahrmund stands at the first window, watching the group.

Bertha.

How do you do, mamma ?

Madam Fridorp.

How do you do, child ? Well, here you are again. (*Looks at her closely.*)

Bertha.

Why do you scan me so closely ?

Madam Fridorp.

You look perfectly well.

Bertha.

Why shouldn't I ? There's nothing the matter with me.

Madam Fridorp.

Don't boast, child ; don't boast.

Louise.

I've brought you a shell, grandma. (*Gives it to her.*) I dug it up for you myself on the beach, with the spade.

Madam Fridorp.

(*Kisses her and takes the shell.*)

Why, the sweet little darling. Did she think of her grandma ? Thank you, dear

child, thank you ; it's a wonderfully pretty shell.

Louise (*eagerly*).

Yes, grandma ; and a boy wanted to take it away from me, but I wouldn't let him have it.

Madam Fridorp.

That was a naughty boy, Lulie.

Louise.

He was a very naughty boy.

Wahrmund.

(*Who meanwhile has been kissing Bessie.*)

There, I must go now.

Bertha.

(*Who has been watching Louise with a smile, becomes grave again.*)

Madam Fridorp.

So you really will not stay to supper ?

Wahrmund.

I cannot. I have urgent business in town. I'll see you again soon, mother. (*Shakes hands with her. To Bertha.*) And don't

come home too late, please, on account of the children. The evenings are already perceptibly cool. (*Takes his hat and cane.*)

Bertha (*carelessly*).

I know, I know.

Madam Fridorp.

(*Moves to go with him.*)

Wahrmund.

No, stay here, mother. (*Exit.*)

SCENE VII.

THE SAME (*without Wahrmund*).

Lena.

(*Hastily moves aside to let Wahrmund pass, then comes into the room and stands before Bertha, who is taking off her hat and cloak. Lena carries both to a table.*)

Bertha.

I have brought you something too, my good Lena. A silver bracelet. Here. (*She gives it to her.*)

Lena.

(Looks at the bracelet with delight, seizes the hand of Bertha, who struggles against her, and kisses it.)

You have always remained our darling treasure. You are always my kind little mistress, whose baby dresses I washed. But Mr. Wahrmund—I don't know what ailed him just now—he stormed at me so—my dead master never did it. And he was a councillor. And I didn't deserve it either. *(She wipes her eyes.)*

Bertha.

(Turns to Madam Fridorp in surprise.)

What was it?

Madam Fridorp.

Oh, nothing! Be quiet, Lena; there was no harm meant. You mustn't keep coming in when visitors are here.

Lena.

Mr. Wahrmund is no stranger.

Madam Fridorp.

It's just the same. Go now, Lena.

Lena.

Come, little folks, come into the garden; I'll show you some beautiful asters and dahlias.
(*Exit with the children.*)

SCENE VIII.

MADAM FRIDORP. BERTHA.

Bertha.

What happened?

Madam Fridorp.

Oh, Wahrmund was a little hasty. He gave Lena to understand, somewhat harshly, that she was interrupting us, and you know how sensitive the old woman is.

Bertha.

But what an idea, to speak angrily to an old servant! Especially when it is not in one's own house.

Madam Fridorp.

Why, Bertha, do you make a distinction between your house and mine?

Bertha.

It is a sad want of tact to play the master here.

Madam Fridorp.

How severely you judge him !

Bertha (*impatiently*).

Oh—let us talk about something else.

Madam Fridorp (*gravely*).

No, my child, we will keep to this subject. You treat your husband strangely.

Bertha (*startled*).

Do you think so ?

Madam Fridorp.

Yes. I *do* think so. (*A short pause.*) And he thinks so too.

Bertha.

How do you know that ? Has he told you so ?

Madam Fridorp.

Yes.

Bertha.

Indeed ? How did he happen to do so ?

Madam Fridorp.

Frankly—he has complained of you.

Bertha.

Behind my back? To slander me to my mother? Fie, how cowardly!

Madam Fridorp.

Why, child, you are crazy. He behaved very properly and sensibly. To whom should he pour out his heart, if not to me?

Bertha.

To whom? To me. If he has any complaint to make he ought to tell me so frankly, like a man. I shall know how to answer him.

Madam Fridorp.

That is exactly what he wished to avoid. And he did perfectly right. If you are so angry with me, what would you do to him? You would certainly scratch his eyes out.

Bertha (*irritably*).

Well, if you can believe that of me—you have certainly allowed yourself to be turned against your own child.

Madam Fridorp.

Don't talk nonsense. I am your mother, and you are my darling Bertha. But for that very reason your irritability pains me. You must keep the peace. What complaint have you to make against your husband?

Bertha.

I have not complained of him, but he of me. What charge has he brought?

Madam Fridorp.

You are unkind to him; you do not look at him.

Bertha (*laughing nervously*).

That is true. What am I to do? Cast languishing glances at him? Ogle him?

Madam Fridorp.

I do not say that, though he does something very like it.

Bertha.

He shows sufficient lack of good taste. He serves as a warning example to me.

Madam Fridorp.

Don't make foolish jests, Bertha; this is no time for them. He says that you do not speak to him, and scarcely answer.

Bertha (*impatiently*).

Well, mamma, if you insist upon knowing the whole story—it is possible that I *am* very silent. What am I to talk about? Business affairs? I care no more for them than for last year's weather predictions. What else? He has no taste for anything except his athletics and feats of strength. They don't interest me. Every opinion I express he considers exaggerated and absurd, and meets with a stolid, narrow-minded Philistine opposition. If a play affects me, and I wish to speak of it, I receive the answer: "Oh, nonsense, crazy trash!" He does not read the books which occupy my attention, art bores him—what can I do except keep my thoughts to myself?

Madam Fridorp.

That is very arrogant, Bertha. Wahrmund

has a great deal of sound sense and experience of life. He is under no obligation to be a historian of art and literature.

Bertha.

And I'm under no obligation to act as speechmaker at table, it seems to me. (*Short pause; then vehemently.*) But what does he really want? I keep his house, I care for the children; when he comes home he finds the meals ready and his favorite dishes; I worry over the servants, I rack my brains daily about the bill of fare—I think I do my entire duty.

Madam Fridorp.

No, Bertha, that is not all. A housekeeper does the same. Men do not marry for that.

Bertha (*suddenly*).

Mamma, why did you marry me?

Madam Fridorp.

A strange question. You were twenty—we were living on my widow's pension—you had not a penny—

Bertha.

I was a healthy human being—I had brains, a heart—one can get along with them.

Madam Fridorp.

Indeed? And suppose I had died like your poor father? Then you would have been alone in the world. What would have become of you?

Bertha.

I should have worked. I should have studied medicine. Perhaps I might now have been independent.

Madam Fridorp.

Wahr mund is certainly right when he thinks you eccentric. The world is not made for such opinions. A penniless girl is a thousand times more apt to go to ruin than to obtain an independent position. A girl must marry.

Bertha.

Yes, so long as mothers take that view, woman's position cannot improve. A woman is a human being. We have the right to live for ourselves. But we are thrown at the head

of the first man who comes along. He is good enough for us.

Madam Fridorp.

The first man who comes along! That certainly was not your case, child. You obtained a kind, handsome, prosperous husband—

Bertha.

Who does not suit me, and whom I do not suit.

Madam Fridorp.

Indeed? This is the first time I have heard of it. You did not think so when you were engaged to Wahrmund. You were as happy in it as I.

Bertha (*vehemently*).

What does an inexperienced, foolish girl know? People are always telling her that she must marry, that it is horrible to be an old maid—the greatest disgrace, the greatest misfortune. She sees her mother fretting and grieving—of course she wishes to relieve her from anxiety. Then a man comes. She constantly hears: A brilliant match! A rich hus-

band! A great piece of good fortune! The mother is happy to get rid of her daughter so well—and the girl takes him.

Madam Fridorp.

My child, you are very ungrateful. Your mother did not wish to get rid of you. She desired to secure your happiness, and, according to human judgment, the conditions for it existed in your marriage.

Bertha.

The conditions for it never exist when the choice is not freely made, and the heart does not speak. Marriage is then no joy.

Madam Fridorp.

Marriage is not solely a joy.

Bertha.

Indeed? What is it then?

Madam Fridorp.

A duty, a social mission.

Bertha.

Something like obligatory military service translated into the female gender? To be rid-

dled with shot for your king and country, and fall shouting : " Huzza ! " No, I thank you.

Madam Fridorp.

I believe you have become a Socialist, Bertha.

Bertha.

That wouldn't be the worst thing that could happen. All discontented people become Socialists.

Madam Fridorp.

Yes ; but why are you discontented ?

Bertha.

Oh, let that pass, mamma. With your idea of marriage—duty—social mission—you would not understand me.

Madam Fridorp.

Another case of the child being wiser than the parent.

Bertha.

That is true. If I should say to you : Life has not only duties, but rights, I should of course be considered eccentric again.

Madam Fridorp.

Rights? What do you mean?

Bertha.

I mean the right of satisfying the heart.

Madam Fridorp.

Of course you have *that* right. But you possess something still better than the right. You have the thing itself. You have your husband, your children—what satisfaction does your heart still lack?

Bertha.

Suppose that does not content the heart? Suppose it needs still more in order to be happy? Have we not the right to strive for happiness, even though we must disregard so-called duty?

Madam Fridorp.

My child, you doubtless think that what you are saying is the very newest philosophy. But it is as old as the world. In the decade of the forties, when I was a very young girl, I read it in George Sand's novels. That's

fifty years ago, and it was nonsense then. There is no happiness outside of duty; whoever tells you the contrary is deceiving you. In the fulfilment of your duty you will find all that your heart needs for its satisfaction. Of course if you heed all your whims and fancies, and cherish them, you can easily imagine that you lack this thing or that. But you must not. A married woman ought to renounce fantastic dreams. She can if she chooses.

Bertha.

And suppose she cannot?

Madam Fridorp.

Whoever cannot, ought not to marry at all.

Bertha.

Mamma, why did you marry me?

Madam Fridorp.

I have already told you once. Besides—if I had not, wherein would you be any better off to-day?

Bertha.

I should be free, and if the right man came—

Madam Fridorp.

The right man? How do you imagine him?

Bertha.

A man who loves me and whom I love, not from duty, but with rapture. A man who understands me, who inspires me, who unfolds my intellect, to whom I look up—

Madam Fridorp.

In short, the fairy prince. My dear Bertha, every girl expects him, but he never comes.

Bertha.

But suppose he does?

Madame Fridorp.

I waited for him till I was thirty-four years old, but he did not appear. Then when your father proposed to me, I was well satisfied with him. He was no fairy prince. We were not romantically in love with each other. But we were good, loyal friends, and remained so until I closed his eyes in death. That is the right man. If you had desired to wait for the fairy prince, he would never have come.

Bertha (*softly*).

Suppose he has come?

(*The following must be very quickly acted.*)

Madam Fridorp.

(*Stares at her suddenly.*)

Child—

Bertha.

What?

Madam Fridorp.

(*With increasing excitement.*)

Child!

Bertha (*timidly*).

Mamma?

Madam Fridorp.

Something is happening—

Bertha (*remains silent*).

Madam Fridorp.

You—you are thinking of some one.

Bertha.

(*Throws herself into Madam Fridorp's arms and hides her face on her bosom.*)

Madam Fridorp.

For heaven's sake—what am I to learn—

how was it possible—speak. (*Rushes to the door and bolts it*).

Bertha.

He is our neighbor—lives on the story above us—he obtained an introduction and is passionately in love with me.

Madam Fridorp.

And you have the courage to tell me so?

Bertha.

Shall I not be frank to my own mother?

Madam Fridorp.

Go on—the whole truth—what has happened?

Bertha.

We were in Heringsdorf—

Madam Fridorp.

And does Wahrmund notice nothing?

Bertha.

I don't know—nor do I care—

Madam Fridorp.

You are out of your senses.

Bertha.

He shall know it. I will make no secret of the fact.

Madam Fridorp.

Bertha, you are mad !

Bertha.

Why? Because I will not dissemble and deceive? Or do you also recommend cheating and hypocrisy?

Madam Fridorp.

What has come over you, Bertha? But who is the scoundrel who has turned your brain?

Bertha.

Don't call him a scoundrel, mamma.

Madam Fridorp.

He *is* a scoundrel. An honorable man does not pay attention to married women. What does he want of you? Probably he has a great contempt for you, or he would not expect you to forget your duty.

Bertha.

You wrong him. His intentions are serious.

Madam Fridorp.

What does that mean?

Bertha.

He wishes me to be his through life.

Madam Fridorp.

And you believe that?

Bertha.

He swears it. Why should he deceive me?

Madam Fridorp.

Even were it true, a woman cannot forsake her husband and children.

Bertha.

I shall not forsake my children. Bardenholm loves them.

Madam Fridorp.

Bardenholm?

Bertha.

That is his name. Under his guidance their

intellectual development would be very different.

Madam Fridorp.

And do you believe that Wahrmund would let you have the children ?

Bertha.

He knows that they will have the best training with me.

Madam Fridorp.

And you could make up your mind so coolly to break your husband's heart ?

Bertha.

He will console himself.

Madam Fridorp.

Silence, unhappy child ! I will hear no more. I forbid you to see this unprincipled man again. Do you hear ? This must end. I'll come to town to-morrow or the day after. You must take a journey—a long journey. Wahrmund is prepared for it. I will go with you, old and feeble as I am. You must be your former self. You must recover your senses.

Bertha.

Mamma, if you would see Bardenholm, if you would listen to him——

Madam Fridorp.

You dare not——

Bertha.

It is useless to part us. It is too late.

Madam Fridorp.

(Putting her hand on her lips.)

Hush, unhappy child, hush ! Even if—you are not accountable. In your present condition no blame can be imputed to you. You are ill. Even if Wahrmund should learn—he will understand. Oh, God ! oh, God !

Lena (*shaking the door outside*).

Is it locked ?

Madam Fridorp (*excitedly*).

What is it ?

Lena.

Open it.

Madam Fridorp.

What do you want ?

Lena.

It's getting cold for the children.

Madam Fridorp.

Go, Bertha, open it. My limbs seem paralyzed. (*Bertha goes to the door.*) The poor children!

(*The curtain falls.*)

ACT III.

Room in Bardenholm's apartments. Door at the right and at the back. Mantelpiece at the left. On the wall above, a group of weapons—rapier, fencing-mask, revolver. In the right-hand corner of the fire-place, a Turkish divan. Arm-chairs, smoking-table, with box of cigars, rack for pipes. At the right, in front, a cottage piano with a mirror above it. In the centre, a drawing-room table with books and albums. In the rear, an étagère with books, bric-a-brac, liqueur-stand and glasses, tumblers, framed photographs.

SCENE I.

BARDENHOLM. DR. BÜTTNER.

Büttner, half reclining on the divan. Bardenholm standing before him with his back to the mantelpiece.

Bardenholm.

(Offering him the box of cigars.)

Light a cigar, Büttner. And smoke it rever-

ently. I give these only to friends who are suffering recent love troubles.

Büttner.

(Chooses a cigar, lights it, and smokes silently.)

Bardenholm.

(After a pause, during which he has watched him.)

At least sigh, if you don't speak. It is a relief.

Büttner.

It's easy for you to laugh.

Bardenholm.

And still easier for you. Only you won't perceive it. *(Pause.)* Will you take a glass of Chartreuse? It really belongs with this cigar.

Büttner.

Thank you, with pleasure.

Bardenholm.

(Brings the Chartreuse and two glasses from the étagère, and fills them. Both drink.)

Now keep a stiff upper lip. We mustn't give way for such a foolish affair.

Büttner.

Such an infamous creature !

Bardenholm.

Bravo ! You said that just like Salvini.

Büttner (*rises and seizes his hat*).

If you constantly make these bad jokes——

Bardenholm.

Oh, come ! Don't take offence so quickly.

(*Takes away his hat and pushes him back on the divan.*) Seriously then—has Madam Burkhard broken with you ?

Büttner.

Brutally. I expostulated with her about little Hergenrath.

Bardenholm.

That was a strange idea. Surely you were not jealous ?

Büttner.

Well ! perhaps not really jealous—. But she made a show of herself with him and rendered me ridiculous. Besides, I could not keep silence. But at my first words she ex-

claimed: "What do you want? To preach morality to me? My husband can manage that better. Besides I will confine myself to no one admirer." "If you would only confine yourself to *one*," I replied. That wasn't bad, was it? She laughed scornfully and said: "*Mon cher*, you are beginning to be terribly tiresome. Let us part in peace before you grow utterly rusty."

Bardenholm.

Very acute, that woman.

Büttner.

You understand that I was furious.

Bardenholm.

Of course.

Büttner.

I left her. When I came back in the afternoon—

Bardenholm.

What? You went there again?

Büttner.

Oh, I thought it was only a whim. I was

going in as usual when the maid came forward and said, "My mistress isn't in." I heard her at the same instant talking and laughing in the studio! "You are joking," I said to the girl, grasping the handle of the door. But the serpent, whom I have warmed with my fees, planted herself in front of it, saying insolently: "My mistress isn't at home to you, and says expressly that you're not to trouble yourself any more about her." Well, what do you think of that?

Bardenholm.

Excellent, old fellow, excellent. You are an ungodly man. If you had a spark of faith in you, you would be uttering a thanksgiving.

Büttner.

For being sacrificed to a Hergenrath!

Bardenholm.

Little Hergenrath is by no means a bad fellow. Besides, I should never be jealous of a successor. Only of a predecessor.

Büttner.

But I love this miserable creature.

Bardenholm.

Büttner, you are using the language of the Middle Ages. Does a son of the nineteenth century express himself in such an old-fashioned way? (*Imitating him.*) "I love this miserable creature." A genuine Minnesinger. Such words should always be sung. Come, say it again. I'll accompany you on the piano.

Büttner.

You are a heartless miscreant. You don't know how one feels after wearing a woman's uniform two years.

Bardenholm.

Yes, I know it well. Such things become a pleasant custom—as Goethe would say. But after two years one must at last think of being transferred to another regiment.

Büttner.

I had not yet grown weary of the garrison.

Bardenholm.

That's just why I blame you. Madam Burkhard is beginning to age.

Büttner.

Which, you see, does not prevent various people from circling around her.

Bardenholm.

Of course. She is fashionable, famous, and especially does not lack readiness to make advances. You won't take offence at my frankness?

Büttner.

You are a strange comforter.

Bardenholm.

Just the one you need, old fellow. Your melancholy tone is base ingratitude to your lucky star. Man, don't you know that in love, as well as in war, the first thing to be considered is to secure a line of retreat? The great difficulty in such relations is always to get clear of them. You now have the undeserved good fortune of not falling upon the usual burdock, but a clever woman, who smoothly wheels away from you; yet you still make an ado. You merit being condemned to lifelong hard labor in the service

of a beautiful woman. But now I'll be serious again, for I really sympathize with you when I see you so melancholy. What do you really desire? What could have been the end of this relation? May I be perfectly frank?

Büttner.

Still franker than before? I am curious.

Bardenholm.

I assure you that I have long wanted to discuss the matter with you. (*Sits down on the divan beside him.*) You had completely lost the perspective of the matter. The woman is an over-ripe orange. She is rich, while you are poor—it was really becoming compromising.

Büttner (*furiously*).

Who would have dared—

Bardenholm.

It's useless to be angry. We must always expect gossip. An affair with a woman who is the fashion is all very well. But it must be as brief as an anecdote, or the whole effect is lost.

Büttner.

The effect? What effect?

Bardenholm.

Don't be so foolish. You have no rich uncle, so far as I know.

Büttner.

Unfortunately.

Bardenholm.

Of course your object is to make a good match—you are now thirty—you must stick to that in earnest. Your affair with Madam Burkhard has given you prestige. Only it lasted entirely too long. It was quite time that it should come to an end. Now mix diligently among truffles and champagne people. Get invitations to the houses of commercial magnates and choose among the daughters of the land. But you must not appear as the Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance; for if you yourself betray that it was she who gave the walking ticket, you will not hypnotize wealthy heiresses—they will laugh at you. Do you understand?

Büttner.

I abhor all women.

Bardenholm.

Nonsense. They are the very prettiest things which nature ever invented. Only we must know how to make the right use of them.

(*A knock at the door on the right.*)

Büttner.

Isn't somebody knocking?

(*Both listen. The knock is repeated.*)

Bardenholm (*starting up*).

Yes, indeed. It's madness. You'll excuse me, Büttner, won't you?

Büttner.

A private visitor.

Bardenholm (*nods*).

And I expect Kalwert in fifteen minutes. But it can't be helped.

Büttner (*going*).

Oh, women, women !

Bardenholm.

(Accompanies Büttner to the door, bolts it, then hurries to the door at the right and opens it.)

SCENE II.

BARDENHOLM. BERTHA.

Bertha.

(Enters closely veiled.)

Bardenholm.

(Bolting the door, embracing Bertha.)

Bertha! At this hour!

Bertha.

Am I interrupting you?

Bardenholm.

Never! But how imprudent! Büttner was just with me. I had scarcely time to get him out. You really must be more cautious.

Bertha.

Cautious? Oh, I am thoroughly tired of it.
(Sinks wearily on the divan. Bardenholm takes off her hat and veil and carries them to the drawing-room table, kisses her on the hair). I

seem to myself so contemptible when I go in and out secretly, obliged to glance around to watch whether any one sees me. Why must I tremble before every eye? Why?

Bardenholm.

(Sitting down by her side and taking her hand, tenderly.)

Because it is the necessary condition of our happiness. Our connection—

Bertha.

No. Not that horrible word! You must never use it.

Bardenholm (*smiling*).

You little touch-me-not. What is there in a word?

Bertha.

There are words which contain a universe of shame.

Bardenholm.

Very well. I will erase it from my vocabulary. What I desired to say is this: I would far rather live with you on a desert island where we were the only human beings and

could rejoice in our love in the presence of the sun, the blue sky, and the sea. But we are not exactly Mr. and Mrs. Robinson Crusoe. We are residents of the capital, and surrounded by a thousand watchful eyes. Happily our position is not made difficult for us. Only we must not defy chance.

Bertha.

Tell me, Otto, does it please you to see me play a farce of dissimulation?

Bardenholm.

Since it can't be helped—

Bertha.

Don't you feel uneasy, when you see how well I can perform it? Does not a fear arise in your mind that I might some time practise the art on you?

Bardenholm.

Oh, I know you too well for that. (*Kisses her hand.*)

Bertha.

Whoever has lied once, can lie again. Were

I in your place, I would never trust a woman who deceives.

Bardenholm.

I know why you do it. I know how difficult it is for you to dissemble. It is a great sacrifice which you make for me, the most touching proof of your love. Besides, you are mistaken in believing that dissimulation, under all circumstances, is dishonorable. The choicest human beings have always regarded it as a necessity to hide their higher lives from the gaze of the common herd. They have claimed it as a privilege of their superiority proudly to exclude ordinary mortals from their most private acts and feelings. Think of the Eleusinian mysteries. We, too, have our Eleusinian mystery (*stroking her hair*). You are my fair secret, Bertha. Surely you must know the lofty sensation of moving amid common mortals and saying to yourself: I know something marvellously beautiful of which you are not aware; I have something precious which you do not possess. It would be a profanation, if this should cease.

Bertha.

You can represent everything in very beautiful colors; I am accustomed to that; but, Otto, you are aware that your Eleusinian mysteries afford me no pleasure. Clear, open relations are a thousand times dearer to me than the most poetic secret.

Bardenholm.

Now you are again thinking in just as commonplace a way as—(*Bertha turns from him pouting. Bardenholm takes her hand and draws the struggling figure toward him.*) Well, I didn't say anything. You see, my sweet little Bertha, I only want to make you comprehend the necessities of our situation, and not uselessly rebel against them. We might have so much pleasure, and you poison every moment of happiness with the most foolish self-torment. Is this sensible?

Bertha.

We might have so much pleasure—certainly—I feel that too—at least I hope so—otherwise—but then matters ought not to remain

as they are. Have you no desire for a change, Otto?

Bardenholm.

To speak frankly, no. At the utmost I would wish you a somewhat more easy temperament. I am perfectly content, so long as I have you.

Bertha (*vehemently*).

But you do not have me. Nor I you. That is just it. I feel so horribly unsupported, adrift, unconnected with the world. I have broken with the past; I see no future; I know not to whom I belong, or what I ought to do. When I am downstairs, the feeling often seizes me that I must go far, far away, where no one knows me. I move about my rooms and suddenly ask myself: "What am I doing here?" I seem like a person in a strange house, and imagine that some one will enter, look at me in surprise, and ask: "What do you want?" And when—when I am not alone, it is far, far worse. That is why you must never wonder if I come unexpectedly.

Bardenholm (*draws her to him*).
You sweet creature.

Bertha (*releasing herself*).

This state of affairs can last no longer. The conflict will kill me. My body below, my soul here—it is impossible. Either one thing or the other.

Bardenholm.

Either one thing or the other! You are a radical little creature. Your “either one thing or the other” can have but two interpretations. “Either” we must be romantic simpletons, and drown ourselves in the Segelsee like a little cloak-maker with her tailor apprentice, who have read shilling shockers till their heads are turned, “or” we must be heroic simpletons and put an end to all torture by renouncing each other. I have no fancy for either the romance or the heroism.

Bertha.

But surely there is a third possibility, and the simplest one of all. I wonder that you don’t think of it.

Bardenholm.

The fact is—I don't see this third possibility.

Bertha.

We have still another choice than to kill ourselves, or to renounce each other—we can surely peacefully belong to each other.

Bardenholm (*joyfully*).

At last! That is what I, too, say constantly. Why torment ourselves? Matters are very well as they are. We will let them remain, and enjoy our lives.

Bertha.

You will not understand me. When I say that we must belong to each other, I mean openly before the whole world, so that we need no longer play hide-and-seek, but can acknowledge each other.

Bardenholm.

I admire your courage, Bertha; I am ashamed to confess that I do not possess it. I am an official. In my position I must regard a thou-

sand things. Probably you do not consider what a terrible scandal there would be——

Bertha.

It would last a few weeks, then the waves of oblivion would close over it. Such things happen every day, and if, afterwards, we live quietly and modestly together, we shall soon be forgotten.

Bardenholm.

Forgotten? When we daily present to the world the spectacle of an unlawful connection?

Bertha (*starting up*).

Unlaw—could you suppose? (*Goes to the table and takes her hat and veil.*)

Bardenholm.

(*Grasping her arm, surprised.*)

Then—what do you mean?—I don't understand you.

Bertha (*struggling*).

Let me alone. I am going.

Bardenholm.

I will not let you go. You must explain.
(*Leads her to the divan.*)

Bertha.

(Sinks down upon it and covers her face with her hands.)

I have what I deserve.

Bardenholm.

Forgive me, Bertha. I did not mean to offend you. You said that we must play hide-and-seek no longer—that we must acknowledge each other. That can only mean—

Bertha.

(Removing her hands from her face.)

Well?

Bardenholm

(Gazes at her in silence.)

Bertha.

Is it really so entirely beyond all sensible reasoning, or do you wish not to understand me?

Bardenholm.

Bertha, I assure you—

Bertha.

To put an end to all difficulties, you need only—give me your name.

Bardenholm (*startled*).

Ah ! (*Looks at her a moment, rises, and paces up and down the room several times in silence.*) So that is what you think. I ought to marry you ! That idea certainly could not have entered my head.

Bertha.

It seems to me the most obvious step.

Bardenholm.

To marry you ! You are not free.

Bertha.

A divorce can be obtained.

Bardenholm.

Do you think that is so simple a matter ? In the first place, there will be a long, unpleasant law-suit. Who is to commence it ? You cannot, for you have no charge to bring against him.

Bertha.

Of course it must be he who sues for the divorce. He probably will when he learns the truth.

Bardenholm.

Yes, but then you will be accused of adultery; I of being your accomplice. We shall appear in court as criminals; for months our names will be dragged through all the sewers; at last you will be condemned—that is, the divorce will be granted against you. What will become of my career I don't know, and, at any rate, even then I cannot marry you.

Bertha.

What? You cannot marry me then?

Bardenholm.

Of course not. When a divorce is granted against a woman on account of adultery she is not allowed to marry her partner in guilt.

Bertha.

That is infamous.

Bardenholm.

What can I do to help you? That is the state of the case. It is the law.

Bertha.

And is there no expedient? Has the law no exception?

Bardenholm.

No—that is, under certain circumstances there is a dispensation, but it cannot be relied upon. Why think of such absurd things at all? Even if we suppose that there is no legal obstacle to our union, still we could not marry each other. (*Sits down on the divan beside Bertha.*) Let us be sensible. I have nothing. My salary is all the means on which I can depend. I have barely enough to pay my expenses and wear respectable neckties and gloves. You, too, have no fortune. On what are we to live?

Bertha.

I shall make no extravagant demands. Peace of mind and definite relations are all that I desire. I will cost you nothing. I'll work, earn money.

Bardenholm.

Child, that is absurd. It is so easy to say: I'll work, I will earn money. But it's just as if you were to say: I will fly, or I'll wake the dead. No; don't deceive yourself about it.

Our lot would be poverty and wretchedness ; and never will I drag you down to such a fate. You are accustomed to live in luxury, at least since your marriage—

Bertha.

This wealth humiliates me. I hate it.

Bardenholm.

Yes. People often pretend or say so when they possess it ; but I should not like to put the haters of wealth to the test. At any rate, I should never forgive myself for tearing you from the comfortable circumstances which suit you. Your beauty needs to be adorned with gems and elegant toilettes. Your refined taste demands an artistic frame for your life.

Bertha.

What a doll you must consider me, if you believe that I prize such external things !

Bardenholm.

The rose does not know what it needs for its growth, but the gardener must understand. I should not like to experience the moment

when I must see your fair brow clouded by sordid cares. (*Kisses her on the forehead. She passively submits.*) And this is not all. My conscience would never permit me to tear you from your children.

Bertha (*excitedly*).

My children? Why should I part from them?

Bardenholm.

You are jesting. If the divorce is granted against you, the children will be taken from you and given to their father.

Bertha.

Their father will never take them from me. He loves them too dearly.

Bardenholm.

That is a conjecture.

Bertha (*after a short pause*).

What do you want to show me, Otto? That there are difficulties to be overcome? I know it. But love conquers all things.

Bardenholm.

That is a form of speech.

Bertha.

Indeed? But only when love itself is a form of speech. True love has the power and the will to struggle for its satisfaction. Otto, was it not you who in verse cried out to me: "Fain would I battle for thy sake"?

Bardenholm.

Remember the next line also: "But may I dare?" I dare not, I dare not.

Bertha.

Ah, if I were but at the beginning of our acquaintance again!

Bardenholm.

Do you repent?

Bertha.

That depends upon you.

Bardenholm.

I promised you love, and love you will ever find with me. Your great, your only fault is that you take everything far too seriously. Why regard our exquisite little idyl so tragically?

Bertha.

A little idyl?

Bardenholm.

It need not be anything else. You have often called yourself my pupil. I wish you were really so. I wish I could impart my views to you. Be somewhat Pagan. Serve the gods of Greece a little. Become conscious of your human rights. You are young; you are beautiful; you need love. Where is the wrong of loving and being loved? Nature smiles approval and sanction. If commonplace morality looks askance at it, do not allow yourself to be disturbed. Loftier minds stand above it. Look around you. In every drawing-room you will find women who do not deny themselves the pleasure of plucking all the flowers which bloom along their life-path. And a perfect radiance of cheerfulness surrounds them. You alone make your heart heavy. You yourself conjure up spectres and then shudder with horror when they surround you. (*Looks at the clock.*)

Bertha.

How can I help it, when I am continually obliged to ask myself: What will come next?

Bardenholm.

You forget that love is its own object. It need not lead to anything beyond. We will love each other to-morrow, as we loved each other yesterday. This prospect wholly satisfies me.

Bertha.

And suppose that our secret is discovered?

Bardenholm.

It must not be discovered. It cannot be, if you use proper caution.

Bertha.

But if it should be? Then what will become of me?

Bardenholm.

Bertha, do you believe that I love you?

Bertha.

Should I be *here*, if I did not?

Bardenholm.

Well, then, you must also have confidence in me. Whatever may happen, I am a man, and I know what I owe you. (*Bertha presses his hand.*) But I repeat: Nothing will happen, nothing at all. Your fancies needlessly darken the fairest moments of our lives.

Bertha.

Fancies! When I ask how this must end?

Bardenholm.

We won't rack our brains about it. Life has solutions which the most vivid imagination will not suggest. We will let the god who watches over lovers provide for us, and meanwhile keep up our spirits. (*Glances at the clock again.*)

Bertha.

You are looking at the clock for the second time.

Bardenholm.

Yes, my sweet little Bertha. My friend Kalwert is coming at four o'clock to attend to some business we have together. He is the

soul of punctuality. You can understand that I should not like to have him find you with me.

Bertha (*slowly rising*).

So I must go?

Bardenholm.

Unfortunately.

Bertha.

(*Reluctantly approaching the table, half aside.*)

Go—always go. And again we have come to no conclusion. And I had so much to say to you.

Bardenholm.

(*Handing her her hat and veil.*)

You shall come again, child, you shall come again.

Bertha.

(*Irresolute, struggling with herself.*)

I shall come again? You don't know—we must form some decision quickly—

Bardenholm.

(*Pushing her gently toward the door, smiling.*)

Is there really so much haste?

Bertha.

(Arranging her hat and veil before the window, hesitating.)

I was at my mother's yesterday. Oh, Otto! she wants to travel in the south—I am to go with—

Bardenholm.

(Who has scarcely listened, goes to the side door, opens it, puts his head out, then hurriedly draws it back, embraces Bertha, and leads her toward the entrance. In a low tone as they walk.)

We will discuss the matter further—and meanwhile be happy, child, be happy, and trust me.

SCENE III.

BARDENHOLM (*alone*).

Bardenholm.

(Stands in the middle of the room. Aside.)

Marry! Incredible! *(Goes to the mantelpiece and thoughtfully lights a cigar.)* Why, if one cannot be safe from matrimony, even with married women—

(The curtain falls.)

ACT IV.

Very elegant boudoir in the Wahrmund apartments. Rose-colored silk hangings arranged in the form of a tent. Thick carpet. Pink toilet-table, with Venetian mirror at the left. Beside it a large three-leaved Psyche looking-glass. Tall lamp with pink shade. In the middle of the wall at the right a mantel-piece with a mirror above and silver candelabra. Pink hanging-lamp suspended from the ceiling. Below it a circular seat covered with pink silk. Plants in the centre. Sofa and arm-chairs at the right near the rear. Doors at the back and the left. Two windows at the right. A pink silk portiere across the door at the back which leads into the drawing-room.

SCENE I.

BERTHA. WAHRMUND.

Bertha.

(Enters in her hat, cloak, and veil, and begins

to take off her veil before the Psyche. Wahr mund comes in directly after, gloved.)

Wahrmund.

Oh ! are you going out ?

Bertha.

(Starts, turns hastily, then turns back again to the mirror. Sullenly.)

No. I've just come home.

Wahrmund.

(Approaches her ; he is drawing off his gloves.)

Just ? What do you call just ?

Bertha.

A minute ago.

Wahrmund (*pleasantly*).

Perhaps a quarter of an hour.

Bertha.

Oh, let me alone. When I say just, I don't mean a quarter of an hour.

Wahrmund.

That is impossible.

Bertha.

Why should it be impossible?

Wahrmund.

Surely you have no invisible cap, child? Or have you? In that case I should often beg you to loan it to me for business purposes.

Bertha.

(Who meanwhile has laid aside her wraps.)

Don't talk nonsense.

Wahrmund.

Well, if you haven't an invisible cap, you must have come down the chimney like a little witch on a broom-stick.

Bertha.

You are in a very jovial mood to-day. I don't feel at all cheerful.

Wahrmund.

Unfortunately, you never do lately. But I should like to know why you tell me that you have just come home.

Bertha (*very impatiently*).

Then ask Minna, who opened the door for me a minute ago, if you don't believe me. That's enough for the present, isn't it? (*Takes a book from the dressing-table and sits down on the sofa.*)

Wahrmund.

That's strange. No, child, I won't question Minna. Do you know that I have been standing in the hall below talking with the landlord since quarter of four? No living creature could have passed me unseen. Besides, during this quarter of an hour not a human being entered the house except a young man, whom I think I have seen with Bardenholm. Well, what do you say now? (*Bertha remains silent and pretends to read. Wahrmund sits down on the sofa by her side, covers the page with his hand, and says coaxingly.*) Now, Bertha, confess. You were going out, and I came at an inconvenient time. Go without hesitation. I won't even ask where, if you don't care to tell me voluntarily.

Bertha.

(Starting up angrily and going to the seat in the centre of the room.)

No, I tell you, no. I was not going out, I had come home.

Wahrmund (*very gravely*).

That is not true. You wound me deeply, Bertha. I have never known you to be a liar.

Bertha (*furiously*).

Liar!

Wahrmund.

I can use no other word. You did not enter the house from the street. That is certain.

Bertha (*intensely excited*).

Well, then, no, I did not come from the street, but from upstairs.

Wahrmund (*astonished*).

From upstairs?

Bertha.

From the third story. From Bardenholm.

(Pause.)

Wahrmund.

(Slowly, in broken sentences.)

You were with Bardenholm ! Yes, now I understand why you did not wish to confess the truth at once—You yourself feel how imprudent it was to go to his apartments. Bertha, you ought not to do this—consider, if any one in the house should see you—what gossip there would be. Other people do not know you as I do,—they will not have the confidence I—

Bertha.

(Who has been struggling with herself, in a subdued voice, but firmly.)

Your confidence is not justified.

Wahrmund.

What do you mean ?

Bertha.

Bardenholm and I love each other.

Wahrmund (*starting up*).

What ?

Bertha.

I have long wished to tell you so. Now

you know. I will have no more secrets. I am no liar.

Wahrmund.

(Clenching his fists, stammers.)

What—you have—you are—

Bertha.

Try to keep cool. You cannot undo what is done.

Wahrmund.

(Rushing upon her and seizing her violently by the wrists.)

Wretch ! Oh ! wretch !

Bertha *(shrieking).*

Let me go. Oh ! you are breaking my arm !

Wahrmund.

(Pressing his hand passionately on her lips.)

Silence ! Unhappy woman !

Bertha *(struggling, shrieks).*

Let me go. Help !

Wahrmund.

(Between his set teeth.)

Silence, I say, no scandal ; the maids will come.

Bertha (*panting*).

If you want no scandal—let me go.

Wahrmund.

(*Hurls her back upon the divan, paces in the utmost excitement up and down the room, often pausing and hesitating.*)

Oh, the wretch ! Here she lives with me—under my roof—kisses my children—yet deceives, and lies, and wallows in the mire—

Bertha.

Kill me, if you wish ; you are stronger than I. But such words—

Wahrmund (*stopping*).

What ! Outcast, you dare to open your mouth !

Bertha.

You are very brave. Keep on ; continue to insult me. I have no protector.

Wahrmund.

Then go to your protector. Go to him ! What do you want here ? What have you to seek here ? Begone, wretch, out of my sight !

Bertha.

(Rises and goes to the door.)

Wahrmund.

(Rushes after her, seizes her by the arm, and drags her roughly back to the seat. She screams.)

Oh, wanton! You insist that your shame shall be known to the world.

Bertha.

I wish to go, if you behave like a wild animal.

Wahrmund.

You wish to go! You wish to go! And you will go, never fear. But first we have a few words more to say to each other—probably the last.

Bertha.

I will not answer until you remember that you are speaking to a woman.

Wahrmund.

A woman? A vile, faithless wife, who deceives her husband! Do you call that a woman?

Bertha.

I have told you the truth. That is not deceiving.

Wahrmund.

Certainly—because I caught you in your hat and veil, because you were discovered in your treachery, and could not lie your way out of it. But for this accident you would have continued to wear the mask of virtue.

Bertha.

It was no accident. If I had not told you to-day, I should have done so to-morrow. I had firmly determined upon it. I wished to play no farce.

Wahrmund.

You wished to play no farce. Yet you have played one—for weeks (*stops and looks at her; she is silent*), perhaps for months (*she is still silent*). You pride yourself apparently upon your frankness—you even admire yourself as the heroine of truth, which you have always asserted yourself to be. You have no cause to do so. Your frankness comes too late. It would have been a merit before you

had sinned. Then you might have come to me and said: "I love another." That would have been straightforward and honest. But after—

Bertha.

(With drooping head, softly.)

You are right. I ought to have spoken at once. That is my only fault. For that I beg your forgiveness.

Wahrmund *(bitterly).*

Your only fault? That you did not confess your sin at once? And the sin itself seems no fault?

Bertha.

(Raising her head eagerly.)

No. It is no fault; it is no sin. When people love each other they have the right to belong to one another.

Wahrmund.

(Gazes at her silently, then sits down in an arm-chair.)

That disarms me. That certainly puts an end to everything. *(A short pause.)* And the

promise you made at the altar? The fidelity you swore to me?

Bertha.

A promise given half unconsciously by an ignorant young girl, amid music and candle-light, cannot be binding for the whole life. So far as I know, no one at the present day has the right to sell herself as a slave.

Wahrmund.

Did you ever feel yourself a slave with me? Were you not free?

Bertha.

The test of my liberty is now made. When you hurl the most cruel insults into my face, and even roughly abuse me, because I obey my own feelings and will, surely you perceive that you are treating me as a slave, and not as an independent human being. You consider me as your property—which I am not. No human being is the property of another. I demand for myself the liberty to obey the voice of my heart.

Wahrmund.

You have not that liberty. There is no liberty to commit a crime.

Bertha.

I have committed none. To deceive you—yes, that was an error. I have entreated your forgiveness for it. But to love—no. That is no crime. That is a human right.

Wahrmund.

(Rising and pacing up and down.)

Perhaps I was wrong in allowing myself to be carried away by anger. I really believe that you are not accountable. Your crazy plays, and your gallant, with his fine phrases, have completely turned your brain. Unhappy woman ! Have you ever considered what would become of the world if it followed your theories ?

Bertha.

What do I care about the world ! I don't have to provide for the world, but for myself.

Wahrmund.

Indeed ! And you *have* provided for yourself

admirably. You can plume yourself upon it. The right to love! A human right, do you say? No. A brute right. The brute pairs with the first male that woos—a human being does not. The right to love! If a woman wishes to preserve that, she does not marry, but becomes a wanton. (*Bertha rises to go. Wahr mund forces her down upon the seat again.*) No, no! you must not run away. People who are as strong-minded as you, must be able to hear the truth. The right to love! I probably possess it as well as you. Have I ever claimed it? (*Bertha is silent.*) I, too, probably do not lack temptations. There are pretty women as well as handsome men. I have eyes, like you—but there is such a thing as conscience. We have a sense of duty. We say to ourselves: Stop! I must not!

Bertha.

As if reason could govern feeling!

Wahr mund.

Indeed? Love is not at once a conflagration. I don't believe in the lightning of your

silly novels. At least not among sensible human beings. Love begins in a small way—in the germ it can be stifled with a slight effort of the will. One need merely shun the peril. A woman should think of her children, of her husband. Of course, if the fire is fed and fanned, the flames will rise over your head. Love can grow from any mutual sympathy, if we permit it. But we must rule it. That is our duty.

Bertha.

Your representations come too late. End them. Let us speak no more of the past, and part without resentment on either side.

Wahrmund.

Without resentment! You have arranged that very pleasantly for yourself. I can understand your feeling no resentment against me. I have done you no wrong.

Bertha.

I do not say that you have.

Wahrmund.

I have loved and honored you. (*He goes to*

the window a moment, struggling to control his overmastering emotion. Turning back again.) I have allowed you to want for nothing. I have lived and labored for you alone. How have you been able to sacrifice me so easily?

Bertha.

Do not torture me.

Wahrmund.

How can another have made you forget duty, fidelity—all? What does he offer more than I? Speak! What does he offer you more than I?

Bertha (*resisting*).

My life was purposeless. You did not aid my mental development.

Wahrmund.

Indeed? That is your grievance. True, I am no elegant, whispering rhetorician. I am a practical man. I don't chatter about realism and the dramas of the future. All that twaddle is not worth a moment of my time. But have I ever restricted you in occupying

yourself with this chaff? You have been able to surround yourself with everything which promoted your mental development. Have I ever jealously prevented your intercourse with the people who regaled you with all the æsthetic phrases which are apparently necessary to your happiness?

Bertha.

Perhaps that was just the very thing. You did not watch me!

Wahrmund.

Was I to watch you? Just now you would be no one's slave. Now you are suddenly a harem odalisque, and I probably ought to keep eunuchs to guard you. When a woman is "an independent human being," as you proudly proclaim yourself, she must do her own watching. I am no Turkish pacha. I am a German merchant. I trust my wife because I respect her. If I am to have no confidence in her, it will be simpler and safer to turn her out of the house than to watch her.

Bertha.

Now you have probably said all that was in your heart. I entreat you to let me go.

Wahrmund.

I will not keep you. You can go. From this hour you are a stranger to me. The sight of you can only remind me that you have polluted this house. (*Bertha rises to go.*) But one thing more. What is to become of the children?

Bertha (*starts*).

The children?—I will take—if they are a burden to you. I will gladly provide for them.

Wahrmund (*scornfully*).

You do not know what you are saying. I will provide for my own children. There is, of course, no question on that score. Our children are girls—do you understand? Therefore their mother's conduct is not a matter of indifference. The mother's reputation is the best portion of their marriage dowry. In twelve or thirteen years the chil-

dren will be old enough to marry. Even then the world will not be converted to your fine theory about the right to love. At least I hope so. I will not have people point their fingers at them and hiss into their ears: "Those are the daughters of the woman who—who left her husband to—to—" Well, you know the rest. (*Paces up and down several times.*)

Bertha.

My children will have no cause to be ashamed of me.

Wahrmund.

I am of a different opinion. True, there is one way of stopping people's tongues. But only one. Therefore I must ask: "What do you intend to do?"

Bertha.

Don't trouble yourself about me.

Wahrmund.

You misunderstand me. So far as I am concerned, I shall not trouble myself in the least about you. I have done with you. I

speak only in the name of the children. You will probably go to your—Assessor? (*Bertha is silent.*) I suppose that he loves you—(*Bertha is silent*) and that he respects you enough, in spite of your treatment of me, to marry you.

Bertha.

You can be sure of it.

Wahrmund.

Very well. If he marries you, then the world will at least have nothing to cast in our children's teeth. True, you will still have destroyed the poor little things' home and broken up the family; but we will hope that they may not realize it—at least during their childhood.

Bertha.

They will never lack a mother's love.

Wahrmund.

Nor a father's. But these two halves are very much less than one whole. We will not talk of that. It is now my duty to settle this point.

Bertha.

What point?

Wahrmund.

Your—remarrying. That must be arranged between the Assessor and myself.

Bertha (*eagerly*).

I will not permit it! No interference! That is our affair.

Wahrmund.

I am not doing it for my own pleasure. The matter is at least as loathsome to me as to you. But it is unavoidable. In order to marry, you must be divorced from me. For this, legal steps must be taken. I want no scandal. Everything must be done to stifle it. But that is possible only if the Assessor and I act together. I am ready to do everything to facilitate obtaining the divorce. We will agree without loss of time about what is to be done. The Assessor is at home. Send Minna up and ask him to come down at once.

Bertha.

I will not.

Wahrmund (*threateningly*).

You must. You have destroyed my life. I will at least escape from the ruins as quickly as possible. The explanation must take place some time. Let it be immediately.

Bertha.

You will be violent—you will wish to avenge yourself—I will lure him into no trap.

Wahrmund (*bitterly*).

Your anxiety about him is touching. Be calm. You know I desire to avoid scandal. That will protect him from me. I shall deal with the matter in a purely business-like way. I wish to obtain the statement that he will marry you. Send up to him. (*Bertha sits still.*) If you won't move—(*he goes to the mantel-piece and rings the bell.*)

Bertha (*timidly*).

What are you doing?

Wahrmund (*harshly*).

Minna is coming. Control yourself. I want no servant's gossip so long as it can be avoided.

SCENE II.

THE SAME. MINNA.

Minna.

(Enters through the door in the background and stands there. After a pause.)

What do you wish?

Bertha.

(Wearily, in a stifled voice.)

Minna—be so kind—see if—

Wahrmund.

(With repressed anger.)

Go up to Assessor Bardenholm's rooms and ask him to come down here for a moment. My wife requests him to do so.

Minna.

(Glances from Wahrmund to Bertha.)

Very well, sir. (Exit.)

SCENE III.

BERTHA. WAHRMUND.

Wahrmund.

(Pacing up and down, after a pause.)

The right to love! Yes. You believed that

you loved me, too. At least you told me so, when we were betrothed. And probably, at that time, you did not lie. You were mistaken. I hope you will not make a mistake again. It won't do to deceive yourself twice, or your right to love will receive a very different name. Well, I trust you will be happy with your Assessor (*very bitterly*). He can develop your intellect more than I. Probably he is more gallant, too. That is always a courtier's way. If it only lasts. The husband cannot compete with the courtier! If he is not aided by a little gratitude, a little fidelity on his wife's part, he must, of course, succumb. Well (*with a wave of the hand*)—that's over.

SCENE IV.

THE SAME. BARDENHOLM. MINNA.

Minna.

(*Opens the door at the back without entering.*)

Please walk in.

Bardenholm.

(*Enters hastily. Minna shuts the door behind*

him. He stops in surprise at the sight of Wahr mund.)

Oh ! I thought—I don't wish to interrupt you, Wahr mund. (*Makes a movement to turn back.*)

Wahr mund.

You don't interrupt us. Stay, if you please. We have serious subjects to discuss.

Bardenholm.

(Starts, but quickly regains his composure.)

Ah ! in that case—pardon me—I have a caller—an important business matter—perhaps another time. (*Attempts to go.*)

Wahr mund.

(Steps quickly between the door and Bardenholm, with his back toward the door and his face toward Bardenholm.)

You evidently suspect—so to the point. I know all.

Bardenholm.

(Shrinks back a step, gazes at Wahr mund a moment in silence, then says quietly.)

I am at your service.

Wahrmund.

Indeed! And you think that settles the matter?

Bardenholm.

I repeat: I am ready to give you the proper satisfaction. This, I believe, spares us the necessity of prolonging this scene.

Wahrmund.

Certainly. That is the correct thing. We must shoot each other. Very prompt. A duel with a deceived husband would make you utterly irresistible. No, Assessor Bardenholm, the matter will be dealt with seriously.

Bardenholm.

I think I am serious enough.

Wahrmund.

I do not agree with you. I will assume that you are a man of honor, though you have basely betrayed my friendship.

Bardenholm.

Sir, I must beg——

Wahrmund.

As a man of honor you will know what remains for you to do.

Bardenholm.

I have already told you—when you choose, where you choose, on whatever conditions you choose.

Wahrmund (*angrily*).

Oh, drop these follies. I appeal to your conscience. You can amend nothing with pistols. In the first place, you owe satisfaction, not to me, but to this woman, the peace of whose life you have destroyed.

Bertha.

(*Who hitherto has sat gazing into vacancy, utters a deep sigh and looks up at Bardenholm.*)

Wahrmund.

You have not said one word about your victim. You have not yet asked what I have decided concerning her.

Bardenholm.

Probably I have scarcely the right—

Wahrmund.

How punctiliously you suddenly weigh your rights. Had you the right basely to betray the friend who gave you implicit confidence? Had you the right to rob me of my wife, and the children of their mother?

Bardenholm.

If you use such words— (*attempts to go*).

Wahrmund (*threateningly*).

You don't stir from this spot until I know how you will atone for the wrong you have done my wife. (*Bitterly.*) I still say “my wife” from habit.

Bardenholm.

(*Who meanwhile has recovered his composure, coldly.*)

Why—I don't know what you expect from me.

Wahrmund.

You have robbed this woman of her honor. But a married woman's honor can be restored, as well as a girl's who has been betrayed, and in the same way—by marrying her. I suppose that you are ready to do so.

Bardenholm.

(Makes a gesture of surprise.)

Wahrmund.

Perhaps you are secretly laughing at the comic spectacle of a man who wishes to marry off his own wife. Wait! The affair will become a serious one to you. So—will you do your duty to your victim?

Bardenholm.

(Coldly, somewhat sarcastically.)

Your wife will scarcely thank you for this interference.

Wahrmund.

I have nothing to do with that. I am fulfilling a duty. I speak as the advocate of my children, who must have no discarded wife for their mother. If you perform your obligations, you will find me ready to settle with you quietly. Finally, I claim no right to detain my wife by force. She is not my chattel. She is a free human being. She can follow her inclination. You have supplanted me in her heart. I will make room

for you; I will not stand in the way of your happiness; I will consent to the divorce. In the eye of the law I will be the criminal—allow myself to be condemned. So the affair can be arranged as a mere formality, without scandal. The children shall spend six months alternately with their mother and with me.

(*Pause.*) Well?

Bertha.

(*Looks up anxiously at Bardenholm.*)

Bardenholm (*avoiding her eyes*).

You cannot possibly expect that without the least preparation—

Wahrmund.

(*Vehemently interrupting him.*)

I think you have had ample time to prepare for the situation. You could not doubt that I should turn out my wife whenever I learned the truth. Will you desert her now, after you have robbed her of family and home?

Bardenholm.

That is a matter to be settled between the

lady and myself. This is not the place——
(*attempts to go*).

Wahrmund.

(*Moves to the door, threatening him.*)

Run away? No, no. We must first come to an understanding.

Bardenholm.

If you put the knife to my throat I shall defend myself. You will gain nothing by force.

Bertha (*in a hollow tone*).

Enough, let him go.

Bardenholm.

Besides, all this in the lady's presence——

Bertha.

(*Rises wearily and tries to withdraw.*)

Wahrmund.

No, no. The "lady" (*scornfully*) must stay. She is "an independent human being," as she says. She owes it to herself to be present when her own destiny is being discussed.

(*Bertha sinks back again upon the seat.*)

Bardenholm.

I have nothing to discuss. I seem to have been lured into an ambush.

Bertha (*duelly*).

Not by me.

Wahrmund (*quickly*).

It was I alone. I wanted to make an end of the affair—if possible, without scandal. Well?

Bardenholm.

In your first excitement you speak of turning out your wife—I understand, of course—but when you are calmer—

Wahrmund.

(*Repressing his rage with difficulty.*)

Let us have no fine phrases. Are you ready to marry the woman whom you have dishonored?

Bardenholm.

But this is really—how can you expect it? In my position, how can I—

Wahrmund.

In your position? I understand. I will

agree to pay a sufficient income for the support of my children.

Bardenholm.

(After a short pause, hesitating.)

That will certainly make matters easier. True, it is extremely unpleasant to take your money. Of course, it is for your children's support—but you must give me time. I must collect my thoughts. I owe it to my own dignity not to appear to yield to violence. I must be able to stand before you, free. *(He takes a step toward Bertha, and makes a movement to take her hand.)*

Bertha.

(Utters a loud cry, starts up and shrinks back.)

Don't touch me !

Bardenholm *(perplexed).*

Why, then—*(to Wahrmund)*—you see—

Bertha.

Enough ! Go ! Go ! *(Sinks into a chair and covers her face with her hands.)*

Wahrmund *(sternly).*

Too late ! If he was good enough for a

lover, he must also be good enough for a husband. So much the worse if you now see his baseness for the first time.

Bardenholm.

Sir, I have offered you the satisfaction of a gentleman. It does not suit me to quarrel like grooms—

Wahrmund.

Don't insult respectable grooms, you elegant scoundrel!

Bardenholm.

A man who will not fight cannot offer insults.

Wahrmund.

(Giving way to his rage.)

But he can break bones. *(Rushes upon him.)*

Bertha.

(Rushing between them with a shriek, and clinging to Wahrmund's uplifted fists.)

No, no!—let him go! Only begone!—begone!

Wahrmund.

(Struggles to release himself, follows Barden-

holm, and in doing so drags the kneeling Bertha with him.)

Out ! miserable villain !

Bardenholm.

(Who has reached the door and tears it open.)

Shopkeeper ! *(Exit. Bangs the door violently behind him.)*

SCENE V.

BERTHA. WAHRMUND.

Bertha.

(Releases Wahrmund, sinks to the floor and drags herself to the divan, where she tries to collect her thoughts.)

Wahrmund.

(Walks rapidly up and down the room several times, then goes to the window and throws it open.)

One must ventilate the room a little, after such a fellow. *(Leans out a short time. Then he turns and wipes his forehead with his pocket-handkerchief.)* Well, are you sufficiently disgusted with your cavalier now ?

Bertha.

(Rousing herself as if from a stupor, in a hollow tone.)

No. With myself. *(She rises, walks slowly to the wardrobe and opens it. Takes out under-clothing with trembling hands, drops many of the articles, picks them up, and puts them in the arm-chair.)*

Wahrmund.

(Leans with folded arms against the wall at the back for some time, watching her.)

What are you doing ?

Bertha *(dully, without turning).*

I am packing.

Wahrmund.

What do you intend to do ?

Bertha.

I am going away.

Wahrmund.

Where ? To your mother ?

Bertha.

(Hastily, stopping in her packing.)

No. I will not inflict that upon her.

Wahrmund.

Indeed! What will you do, then?

Bertha.

(Hesitating, with downcast eyes.)

I don't know yet. I want to get out of your sight. Away from all who know me. I shall seek some position. As governess. As housekeeper. As nurse.—I don't know. *(She stands motionless, staring into vacancy.)*

Wahrmund.

(Paces up and down several times, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly, and then stops before Bertha. Slowly.)

Well. You will keep a house. You will nurse and rear children. I will make you a proposal: Nurse and rear your own children—keep your own house.

Bertha.

(Gazes at him with dilated eyes, panting for breath.)

Oh—you—*(rushing toward him)*. You will forgive?

Wahrmund.

(Hastily retreating a step, stops her with a gesture of his outstretched hand, and answers sternly.)

You are mistaken! *(Bertha lets her head and arms sink loosely.)* I will not forgive. You did not understand me. I will explain what I mean. *(Bertha sinks into an arm-chair. Wahrmund steps in front of her and says slowly, letting the words fall with a sort of pleasure in self-torture.)* What I offer you is no forgiveness, but a severe penance. A terrible atonement. You shall stay here. Before the world nothing is to be changed. You shall continue to be Madam Wahrmund, and to preside at my table. But your guilt will stand between us like a spectre. We shall be strangers to each other. You, who abhor dissimulation, will be forced to play an intolerably wearisome farce, before society, before the children, even before your mother. You will be in the same room with the husband whom you have deceived and who judges you, and you will be unable to hide yourself

from his eyes. You will go to social entertainments at my side, you will feel my arm shrink with repugnance at the touch of your hand, and you will be compelled to wear a smiling face. Your home will be a prison to you. You would not be a slave. You will be the slave of your own guilt. You see I conceal nothing and palliate nothing. You will suffer bitterly. So, too, shall I. For to me also it will be a constant torture to have the sight of you remind me of everything—to have around me the phantom of a happiness which is lost (*as if struggling to repress a thought dawning in his mind, impressively*), forever lost. This is a hellish torment. And I have not deserved it. But I know why I impose it upon us both—for the children's sake. They must perceive nothing. They must continue to dream their childish dreams of peace and happiness. Because, if people have children, they owe them their lives. You did not consider that. Now, sacrifice yourself for them. This shall be your atonement. Perhaps you think it too hard.

Strengthen yourself by the thought that the children at least will respect you, though—I cannot. Have you the courage to take up your cross?

Bertha.

(Hiding her face in her hands.)

I cannot. It is too hard.

Wahrmund.

Think of the children.

Bertha *(as before)*.

To die—that is the solution.

Wahrmund *(dully)*.

For you—not for the children.

(After a pause.)

Bertha *(sobbing)*.

Do with me as you choose. I will atone—till you forgive.

Wahrmund.

(Makes a gesture of repulse.)

(The children are heard entering the anteroom, calling loudly: "Where is mamma?")

Wahrmund.

(Puts his hand on Bertha's shoulder, saying quickly.)

Control yourself—the children must not see you so.

Bertha.

(Starts up, stands for an instant as if bewildered, then passes her hand across her eyes and totters out.)

Wahrmund.

(Looks after her until the door has closed behind her, then sinks slowly into a chair and hides his face in his hands.)

(The curtain falls.)

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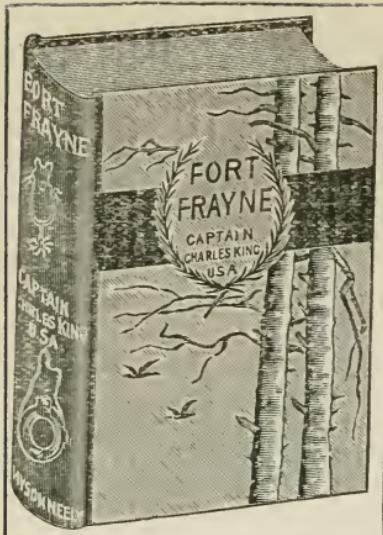
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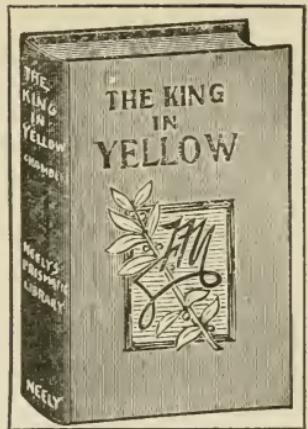
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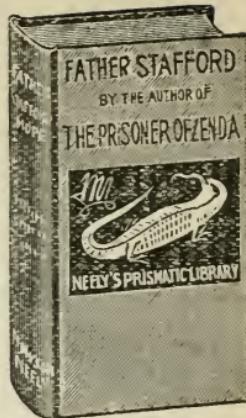
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